bloom

gardening • nature • inspiration

VISIT…

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Nature is changing

If you ever want to wake up your imagination, step outside. If you can find a wild place, even better. Because if the millennia of nature-inspired art, music, literature, dance and other creative endeavours are anything to go by, being among flora and fauna helps humans conjure up good and beautiful ideas and find greater meaning in whatever we do.

When Bloom was just a seed in my mind, one of the main drivers for going it alone and publishing a magazine was the freedom of drawing on nature to create something original, handsome, inclusive and, of course, useful. Nearly five years on and that is still what motivates me – but the world is not quite as it was in 2018. So it feels like the right time to reinvigorate Bloom's now well-loved pages.

Art director Sarah Pyke has brilliantly perked up the design of the magazine, which we hope feels familiar but refreshed. And we've worked with the excellent illustrator Amelia Fowler to introduce a few fun elements to the pages and branding.

The main change, however, is the magazine's size. This compact format (with more pages) was all about reducing waste. From day one, the intention was to encourage people to keep their copies of Bloom, refer to them for years, share them with friends. But I'm always looking for ways to be more sustainable, and printing this exact size means a minimal amount of paper is trimmed or wasted.

This magazine was created following the arrival of my baby boy Raef – he's inspired lots of exciting change and this issue is dedicated to him. If you're looking for your own creative catalyst over spring and summer, you'll find it here. You could try a new colour on your plot and plate (p50), grow an old classic in a different way (p46) or learn about the reimagining of our gardens and public spaces (p18, p54, p92). These pages are packed with ideas to tempt you outside – and that's one thing that hasn't changed.

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2023

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Photography *Jaime Molina*

‘And then my *heart* with *pleasure* fills, and *dances* with the *daffodils*...’

Wordsworth knew it – these nodding delights offer far more than a pop of colour on roundabouts. We speak to Caroline Thomson, founder of Scotland’s Daffodil Festival, about spring’s essential flowers

Previous page *Narcissus* 'Avalon'
Opposite, bottom left *N.* 'Conspicuous'
bottom right *N.* 'Niveth'

Caroline Thomson wasn't always dotty about daffodils, but horticulture must be in the blood. On her mother's side, the Backhouse family boasts a long line of botanists and nurserymen, most notably William Backhouse (1807–1869), who was an early pioneer in daffodil (*Narcissus*) hybridisation and the first in a dynasty of hybridisers spanning three generations over 100 years. The RHS daffodil register currently lists more than 950 Backhouse-bred cultivars. As well as the daffodil raisers, there were renowned nurserymen, plant collectors and naturalists among the Backhouses in the 1800s and into the twentieth century.

With concerns about the conservation of this horticultural history being lost to time, Caroline set about gathering true examples of the plants bred by her ancestors and safeguarding their heritage on her estate, Backhouse Rossie, in Fife, Scotland.

'William's careful, observant breeding improved daffodil cultivars forever. His descendants also created cultivars which amazed the world with pink, red and white trumpets,' Caroline tells us. 'It's been hard work searching for named cultivars, identifying possibles and looking after the collection, but it's also an uplifting experience, with a hunt that's involved studying diaries and old photographs, jogging the memories of living relatives and drawing on the experience and knowledge of experts.'

If you could happily live without the often garish yellow trumpets in your garden

you're not alone: when William Backhouse started raising daffodils in the early 1800s, they were far from fashionable. It wasn't until the late Victorian and Edwardian period that the flowers came into favour, eventually becoming a staple of not only our domestic gardens, but municipal green spaces, from royal parks to suburban roundabouts.

'It's rare to find a flower that can flourish in rough roadside grass, amid a build-up of salt and grit and forceful water sprays from the wheels of passing lorries and cars,' says Caroline, in their defence. 'They can survive icy blasts, as well as intense sunshine and drought. But best of all is their sheer variety: some are just a few inches tall or richly scented, some long-stemmed and elegant, others sturdier and filling hedgerows and borders. And all in a rainbow of colours: white, ivory, pink, coral, reds, oranges, lemon, pale primrose, golden yellow.'

The gardens at Backhouse Rossie have become a showcase of some 30,000 daffodils of many forms and origins, offering a scented journey through the evolution of the daffodil, from the first Wordsworth-style crosses to the latest creations. Holding both the National Collection of Backhouse cultivars and Scientific Collection status, the assembly of plants also provides plenty of history and beauty to explore. 'The Scottish Daffodil Festival has been running here since 2016 and is a huge date on the country's events calendar,' says Caroline.

A trip to Backhouse Rossie to see the daffodils will no doubt fuel new planting ideas but, to start you off, Caroline has a tip: 'Planting daffodils in threes with other plant varieties is a great way to catch the eye. They look wonderful in a spring border with plants such as the early flowering *Pulmonaria officinalis*.'

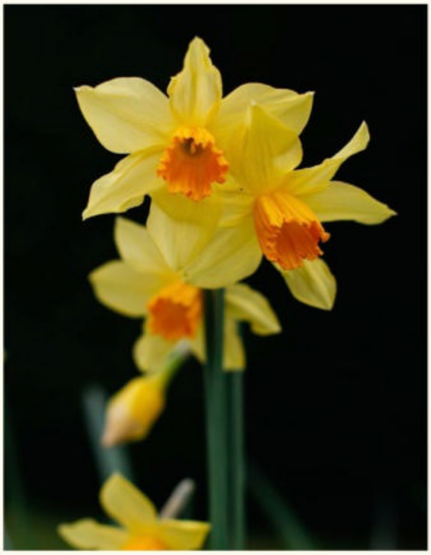
She also suggests 'WP Milner' – an elegant, creamy-coloured dwarf daffodil – with the jewel-like flowers of *Primula auricula*. And mentions that 'Pink Pride' (a showstopping daff with apricot-pink cups) works well with *Scilla* 'Pink Giant', *Muscari armeniacum* 'Valerie Finnis' and *Chionodoxa luciliae* – a sugary combination that would have surely filled Wordsworth's heart with pleasure.

So next time you see a swathe of near-neon-yellow flowers at an A-road junction, remember there's a lot more to daffodils than you might think.

Scotland's Daffodil Festival runs April 7–10; Backhouse Rossie opens April to September. backhouserossie.co.uk

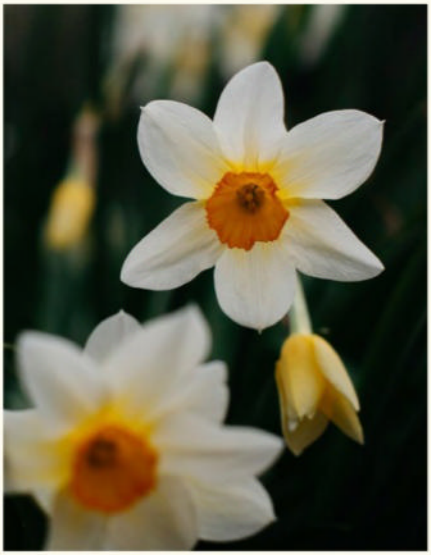
A SPRING FLING

Four Backhouse daffodils to fall for



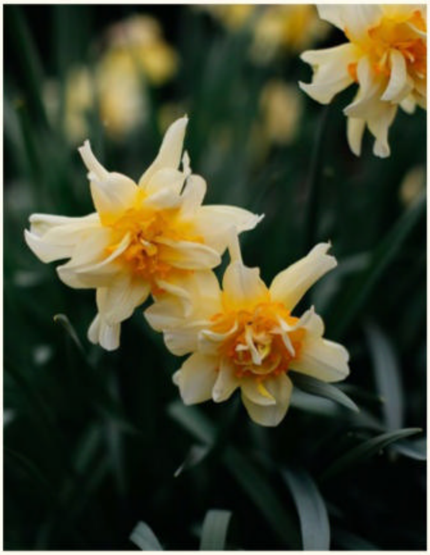
‘CJ BACKHOUSE’

Flowers mid-season, grows taller than most Backhouse varieties and has a charming nodding orange-red cup. Bred by William Backhouse and named after his son, Charles James.



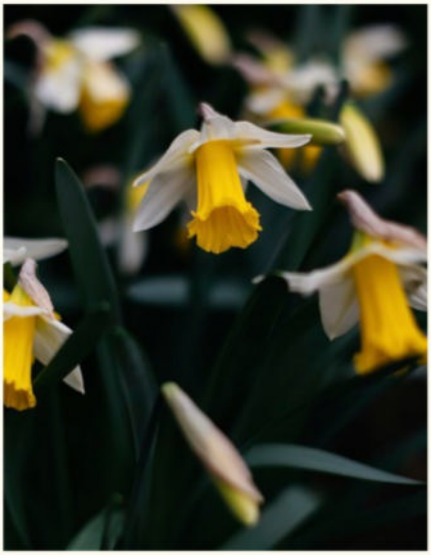
‘SUNRISE’

An orange cup with yellow markings suffused across the centre of white petals – a sunrise in miniature. Sarah Elizabeth Backhouse (née Dodgson) amazed the daffodil world with this creation.



‘GLOWING PHOENIX’

A double flower of primrose yellow and orange, which flowers very early. Bred by Robert Ormston Backhouse pre-1930.



‘EMPRESS’

A beautiful, refined flower with a graceful pose – it’s a good grower and always much admired. Bred by William pre-1869.

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STEP OUTSIDE WITH...

MARCHELLE FARRELL

Marchelle Farrell is a writer, psychotherapist and amateur gardener. Born in Trinidad and Tobago, she's spent more than two decades attempting to become hardy after emigrating to the UK aged 19. She is deeply curious about the relationship between our external and internal landscapes, the patterns we reenact in relation to the land and how these might be changed. Marchelle spends her time getting muddy with her children in a cottage garden in Somerset, as well as writing about the things the garden teaches her. In 2021 she won the Nan Shepherd Prize for underrepresented voices in nature writing and her debut book, *Uprooting* (Canongate), is out in August.

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SPOT

—

My most magical childhood memory is of living sparks of light floating around our garden in the tropical dusk. Fireflies seemed fantastical creatures and, despite learning the science of how they light up their bodies at night, I could never shake a lingering belief that they were really fairies. Like fairies, they disappeared as I grew up. So coming home late one summer evening to the otherworldly gleam of a glow worm in our Somerset garden convinced me of the magic of this place.

Like many of our declining insect species, glow worms like a bit of mess and untidiness in the garden. Grass that is left long over high summer – when the glowing female beetles searching for mates are most likely to be seen – provides a home for the insects during the day. They feed on snails and slugs, so ridding your garden too thoroughly of these creatures so often viewed as pests also deprives the glow worm larvae of their meals. Artificial lights in the garden at night disturb mating and pesticides of any kind will adversely impact them as well. So a little lazy gardening, letting the slugs and their natural predators be and embracing the dark just might bring the gleam of magic to your own garden.

READ

—

Coming to love an English country garden after growing up in the British colonial Caribbean has been a complicated journey, and one that is all too rarely written about. One of my favourite writers on the joys and frustrations of growing things is Jamaica Kincaid, who grew up in Antigua but captures the delight and disturbance of growing in her temperate garden in Vermont perfectly in *My Garden (Book)*, a collection of essays about her relationship with gardening.

If you love gardens, gardening or gardeners, this book is one to savour. From her laugh-out-loud observations about the quirks of gardens and those who tend and enjoy them, to her thoughtful invitations to think more broadly and deeply about the meaning of the things we grow and how they have come to be in our gardens, there is something to enlighten and discomfit all readers in this book.

Jamaica writes deftly and lightly about the topic of colonialism and the devastation it has wrought on our inner and outer landscapes from the comfortable common ground of the garden. She inhabits that space with such ease as she invites us all in to share her delight in plants while guiding us to curiously wonder about the discomfort inherent in our gardens, a tension we all need to bear.

GROW

—

Having inherited a gardening legacy scarred by a history of enslaved ancestors, one thing that has been reparative for the painful historical associations that growing food carries has been growing edible beauty. Finding heritage varieties of commonly grown and eaten vegetables was hugely helpful, and indeed healing, in this process. A broad bean is no ordinary pulse when it has been preceded by the vivid crimson, heavily fragrant flowers of the crimson-flowered heritage variety; it is no harder to grow than ordinary broad beans, if somewhat rarer to come by.

Something about feeding myself with the exquisite beauty of these less usual vegetable varieties – magnificent purple-flowering peas, deep blue potatoes with beautiful flowers as ornamental as any other in the garden, the massive, sweet cloves of elephant garlic – helps to heal the more harmful connotations of tending the land that were forcibly imprinted on my DNA.

And these more unusual varieties are helpful in other ways too. In a changing climate, resilience is found in embracing diversity in the food we grow. Reviving a wide range of heritage vegetables, and going even further to save our own seeds and create new varieties adapted to our particular growing conditions, can provide a helpful buffer against monoculture crop failures and shortages in the climate crises that loom on the horizon.

FORAGE

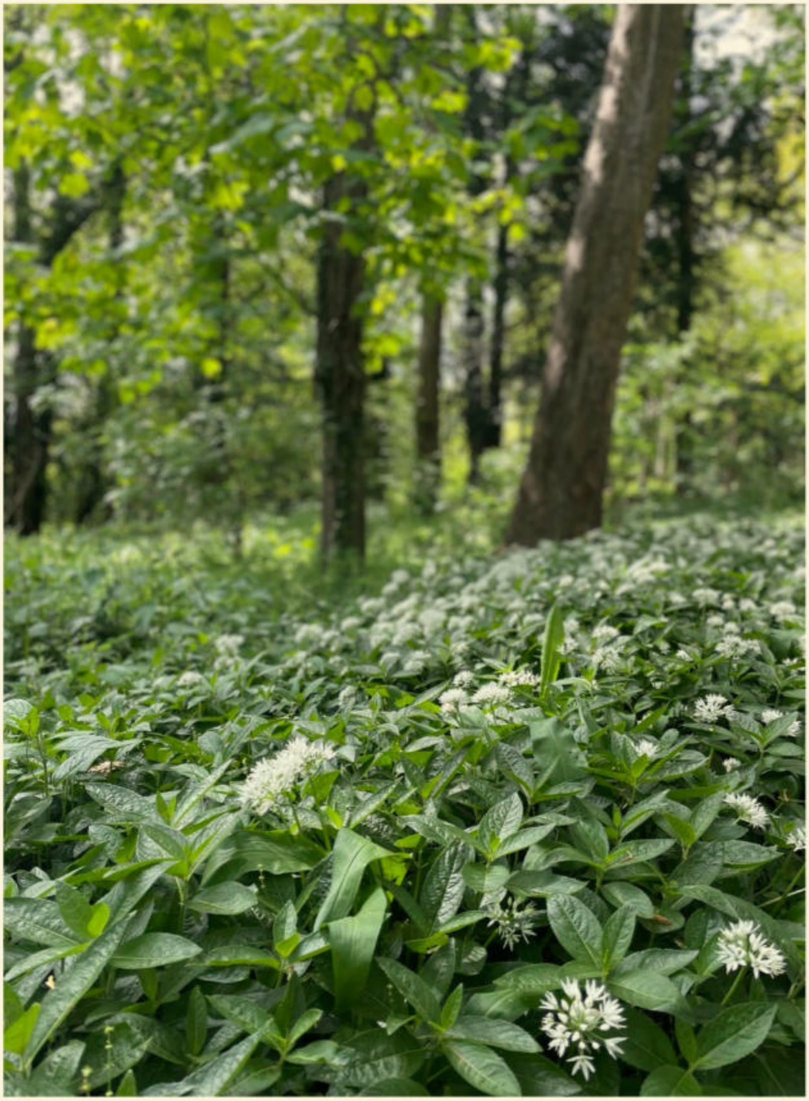
—

The bright shard of wild garlic slicing through the earthiness of a winter woodland is the sign that tells me spring has truly arrived. The fresh green of the broad leaves shines against the dull, dark evergreens that have survived the winter months. In spring and early summer the woods here in Somerset are carpeted with wild garlic, an indigenous plant and a sign of ancient woodland that I find as comforting and nourishing to the soul as the pesto we make from foraged leaves is to the body.

I follow the rules of the honourable harvest, taking only a small proportion of what I find, leaving plenty for other foragers, human and otherwise, and for the plants to thrive and reemerge next spring. A single leaf carefully chosen every few plants in a dense patch can provide a generous harvest, and a reminder of the abundance freely offered if only I take the time to notice and appreciate it.

I show my gratitude by whizzing up neon green jars of sharp pesto. Topped with a layer of olive oil and frozen, they keep for months. There is nothing like the time travel of opening a jar to stir through a midweek meal of pasta in deepest winter, and feeling my tongue cleave with the enlivening zest of spring.

> **In a changing climate, resilience is found in embracing diversity in the food we grow**



The landscape shapes me as I shape it; this is a belonging that is mutual and profound

VISIT

—

The Wildlife Trusts is a nationwide network of grassroots charities that look after 2,300 nature reserves across the country, nearly all of which are free to access. When I lived in the middle of Oxford, I learned about our local Wildlife Trust, and through their guide came to discover a whole range of different, beautiful, wild landscapes – forests, wetlands, meadows and more – many of which were tucked away within the city and its suburbs or easily accessible nearby.

As a family we began spending more and more of our time in these spaces, which so often felt completely secret, hidden in plain sight, glossed over by busy eyes scanning from one building to the next. It was in these ordinary wild places that I began to understand that I could feel a connection to this foreign landscape and to imagine that this soil would welcome me and let me feel I belonged. In these spaces I felt safe. They were our gateway to eventual countryside living.

The Wildlife Trusts is supported by membership, but no payment is required to access its website, which hosts a complete guide to all of its sites with helpful information about how to visit. And, if inspired, lots of information about how to get involved to help wildlife in various ways.

CONSIDER

—

With a heritage of dislocation and disruption from place, a mixed ancestry of immigrants both willing and forced, and a personal history of compulsive repetition of patterns of unsettled upheaval, finding a place to root and belong has been my lifelong desire. The concept of nativity has always felt fraught with such a hurt and fragmented history, and the idea of belonging has come to feel like an act of repairing the whole.

Reclaiming belonging in this place has come with a remaking of my self in a very literal way, from the cells up. Growing food and eating things foraged and grown in the landscape in which I live means that my body, the tissues of which are continually repairing and rebuilding themselves in the course of daily life, is gradually being sculpted with the fabric of this place as I shed my old self. My muscles and bones, organs and systems are becoming made of the same material as my surroundings. The landscape shapes me as I shape it; this is a belonging that is mutual and profound.

Through epigenetics – the interaction of environment with the genetic code – the way my DNA is expressed changes. These changes will be written into my descendants' cells. In this way we can encode repair. We are living, breathing reparations.

ROOT + GROW

INSPIRATION FOR LIFE OUTDOORS ➔

Gardening in the climate crisis

It's no longer ignorable: the world is changing, and what we grow and how we grow it will have to change too. We asked eight experts what the garden of the future will look like

Record-breaking climate extremes are now so frequent that claims of 'freak' weather events are losing their power to alarm. Unprecedented levels of heat, cold and rain are becoming normal not only in Asia, Africa and the US, but in Europe and the UK. Scientists are forecasting the most intense weather to date for 2023, with the hottest conditions ever charted.

Thinking about how to garden in the face of the climate crisis may seem trite or even daunting in these extraordinary times, but understanding how to nurture nature in harmony with these fluctuating conditions is one of the most powerful survival tools we have. We turned to the experts to find out what the future holds for gardeners and how to garden with more resilience.

THE SCIENTIST

Dr Gina Cavan, applied climatologist at Manchester Metropolitan University

Manmade climate change is caused by a high amount of carbon dioxide in the Earth's atmosphere, largely from the burning of fossil fuels. This is making extreme weather events – including stormy rainfall, heatwaves and drought – more frequent. Average temperatures are also increasing in all seasons, which means gardeners will see extended growing seasons in spring and autumn for many plants as well as fewer frosts over winter.

Illustration
Amelia Fowler

Gardens play a critical role in helping us to be more climate resilient by providing flood and heat alleviation, particularly in urban areas. While an individual garden may seem insignificant, when we add up the footprint of all gardens in a city, they make up around one fifth (20 percent) of the land. Our research shows that urban gardens are only around 50 percent green and blue space (vegetation and water); the other 50 percent is hard surfaces, which means that the potential benefits are reduced.

The natural processes of green and blue space provide many benefits for climate and wildlife. They help cool the air, drain or soak up rainfall, store water and remove pollutants. Tarmac, concrete and other hard surfaces, on the other hand, can have negative effects on climate resilience: water cannot drain through, enhancing surface water runoff and causing flooding. These surfaces are often dark in colour, absorbing and radiating heat, causing the nearby air to warm up. Re-greening (and blueing) our urban gardens is therefore very important.

Protect your soil against drought, waterlogging and nutrient leach from heavy rains by ensuring the soil is never left bare: grow ground cover plants, apply mulch and keep planting dense

—

Gina is a senior lecturer in GIS and climate, as well as deputy director of the Ecology and Environment Research Centre. ginacavan.com

Composting garden and kitchen waste and growing food organically reduces our reliance on industries that use fossil fuels and chemicals

THE ECOLOGIST

Gemma Golding, senior ecologist at the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS)

Some problem species and diseases that have previously been confined to greenhouses or hotter parts of the world are likely to become more widespread and frequent, as we've already seen with glasshouse thrips (*Heliothrips haemorrhoidalis*).

Studies have shown many species, particularly butterflies and bumblebees, are shifting their ranges northwards. This (along with population declines) means that some common garden species might reduce or disappear. But at the same time, ones that previously only visited the UK from the continent in the summer could become more common, such as the hummingbird hawk-moth. While some non-native species can be problematic, this only applies to a fraction of new arrivals. Many will simply naturalise, as the tree bumblebee has done, so gardeners will see some fascinating new creatures making the most of their flowers!

Stressed plants are generally more susceptible to problems posed by pests and diseases, so we need to work hard to ensure healthy, well-watered plants. To do this, gardeners can consider their gardens as functioning ecosystems, planting densely, diversely and by promoting wildlife. Matching the species to the conditions of the garden and considering the benefits (or ecosystem services) each plant can deliver will give the garden more resilience to future changes.

Nature-based solutions mean a focus on vegetation and managing water. For example, consider whether stepping stones rather than block paving can be used to allow for more planting and improved water drainage. Or, can green walls or climbing plants provide nesting habitat, shelter or food? Can green roofs be installed to act as green corridors in built-up areas, as well as provide cooling and improved air quality? Ponds are becoming even more important, as they attract a host of species and can be designed as part of a sustainable drainage system using water runoff from buildings, slowing the flow and collecting water.

THE ACTIVIST

Ellen Miles, founder of the campaign Nature is a Human Right

Ask not what the future will do to your garden, but what your garden can do for the future. Attaining true resilience to ecological and meteorological uncertainties (and the social insecurities they bring) means escaping the individualist bubble of patchwork backyards and instead creating a connected, united network across neighbourhoods.

Consider how your garden can speak to those around it, providing corridors for wildlife and plants to pollinate with one another. More dramatically, consider how your garden could crawl over walls and across pavements – how you might start seeing it less as 'yours', and more as part of the world.

The logical conclusion of this? The future will be full of 'guerrilla gardeners': people planting in public places. Though it is at present a controversial idea, my hope is that the term soon loses its activist connotations as cultivating local streets becomes the norm, rather than a renegade action. So, if you truly wish to garden with resilience, get guerrilla gardening.

—

Ellen is the author of books including *Guerilla Gardening* (DK), out in May. natureisahumanright.earth

THE DESIGNER

Tom Massey, award-winning ecological landscape designer

In order to design a resilient garden we need to move towards site-specific design, rather than just catering for current – often fleeting – tastes and trends. Analysing your garden conditions and the surrounding area in detail will help you to do this. For example, what type of soil do you have – is it rich, acidic and fertile, or poor, free draining and alkaline? Looking at what is growing locally around you can also help inform planting choices. Choosing plants that are well adapted to the conditions will help ensure success and avoid a heavy input of resources such as water, fertiliser, pesticides and so on.

Find plants you love that can withstand the conditions – my most beloved resilient plant is Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*). It grows on exposed cliffs in Cornwall and its tortured form, ravaged by salty coastal winds, is sculptural and beautiful. It also works in an urban setting where its dense evergreen foliage is good at capturing and filtering particulate air pollution.

This planning extends to hardscape too. Think about locally available or reclaimed materials that could be used instead of materials shipped long distances, such as waste timber used to make a garden boardwalk. And consider the carbon used in the material's production: as a general rule, the less processing a material undergoes (such as natural stone and untreated timber), the less carbon is embodied in the material.

In general, aim for a looser, more 'wild' aesthetic and encourage plenty of biodiversity – if your garden flourishes naturally, rather than requiring constant human intervention to keep it looking attractive, it will be more resilient, sustainable and wildlife friendly. ➜

—

Tom is the author of *RHS Resilient Garden: Sustainable Gardening for a Changing Climate* (DK), out in April. tommassey.co.uk

THE DESIGN STUDIO

We asked landscape designer Caroline Clayton of Viriditas Design Studio to imagine a biodiverse, climate-resilient space with all the key features our future gardens could include

—

viriditasstudio.co

A Wildflowers on a green roof support wildlife, absorb heat and reduce and slow rainwater runoff

B Pots with herbs and pollinator-friendly, edible plants

C Tension wires to grow climbers, which help to insulate and cool buildings and provide shelter, nesting space and forage for birds and other creatures

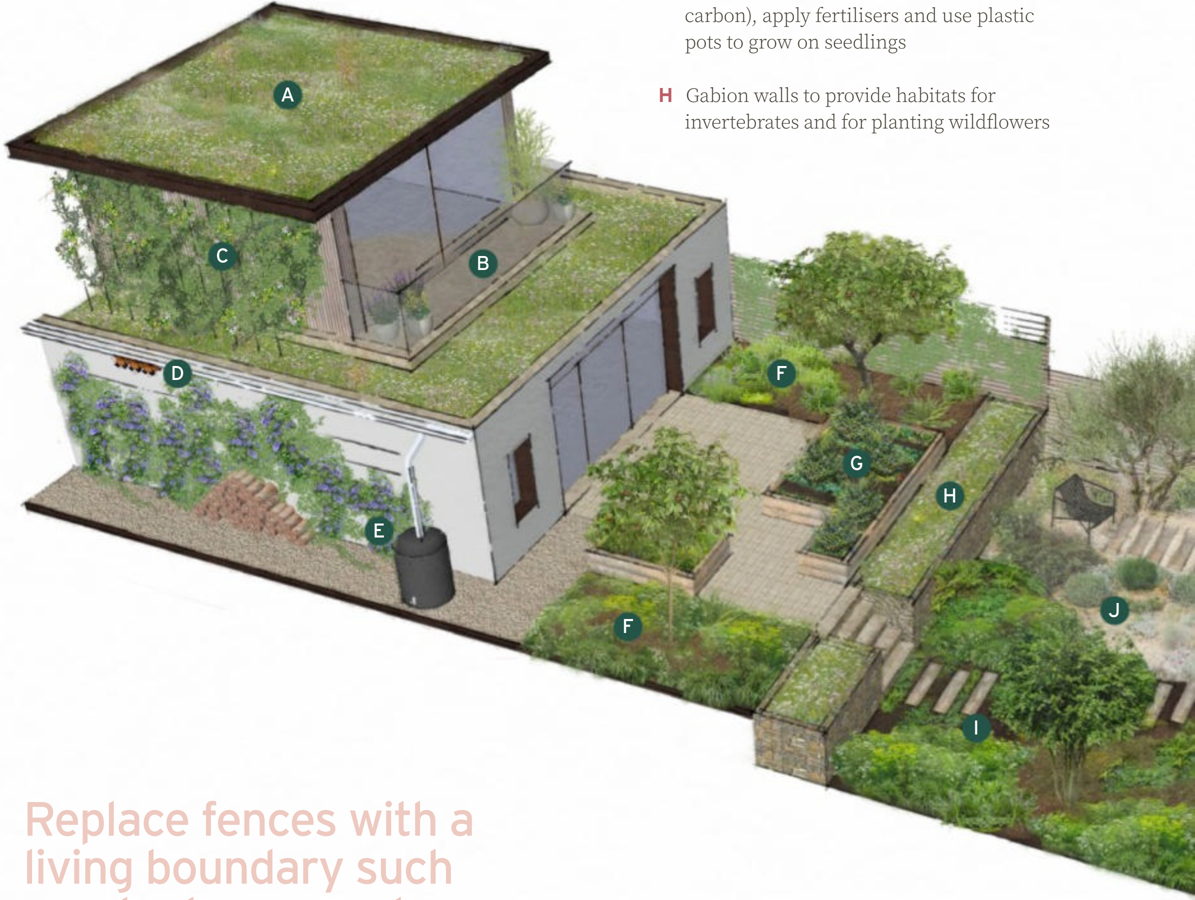
D Swift or swallow boxes for birdlife

E A water butt to collect rainwater

F Mini food forest that mimics a woodland edge environment, with fruit or nut trees as the canopy layer, berry bushes as a mid/shrub layer and edible and nitrogen-fixing ground cover plants

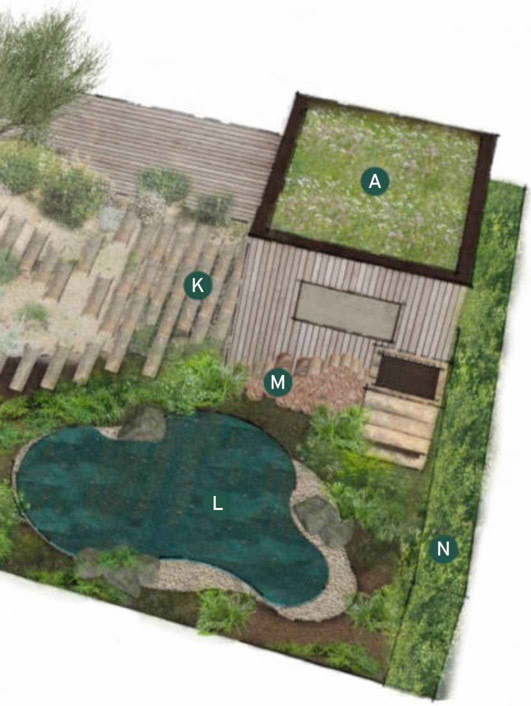
G Food beds for perennial edibles such as raspberries, as they are less carbon-intensive than annuals that can require you to dig the soil (which releases carbon), apply fertilisers and use plastic pots to grow on seedlings

H Gabion walls to provide habitats for invertebrates and for planting wildflowers



Replace fences with a living boundary such as a hedgerow or trees to act as a windbreak

- **I** A woodland garden on the north-facing (shady) side mulched with bark and planted with native trees such as hazel. This offers habitats for invertebrates, hedgehogs and other small mammals as well as fungi. Hazel catkins are an early source of pollen for bees, while its nuts are good small mammals like dormice
- **J** A gravel garden on the south-facing (sunny) side with drought-tolerant plants
- **K** Reclaimed sleepers form a pathway and terrace
- **L** A pond acts as a reservoir for water and supports wildlife diversity
- **M** A log pile habitat and composting area
- **N** A native hedgerow, which acts as a windbreak and includes foraging plants for humans and wildlife



THE ORGANIC FOOD EXPERT

Garden Organic's knowledge officer Dr Anton Rosenfeld

One of the biggest challenges of climate change is climate unpredictability. This is particularly the case for pests and diseases. If we agree that winters will be milder and wetter, then more pests and diseases will survive the winter and start to build up earlier in the spring. This would apply to slugs, whitefly, aphids and diseases such as rose black spot and pear rust. If hotter, drier springs and summers are expected, then we could experience fewer problems with diseases such as potato blight that need warm, damp conditions to proliferate, and see more brassica aphids and flea beetles causing devastation.

Diversifying the food we grow will spread the risk and bring new growing opportunities. It's my guess that brassicas are likely to be hit unduly hard by pests and disease, so it would be wise to address our overreliance on this plant family and to generally reduce reliance on any one particular plant. Instead, look to other crops such as amaranth, which are so far quite untroubled by pests. This approach shouldn't bring complacency, as other pests with an appetite for our new plants will emerge! So diversity in planting remains the key to successful and organic growing. ➜

—

Garden Organic is a charity promoting organic growing, research and seed conservation. gardenorganic.org.uk

THE URBAN LANDSCAPE DESIGNER

Darryl Moore, co-founder of urban landscape organisation Cityscapes

Sow heritage seeds when growing edibles, as they can be saved from year to year and will become more resilient to the conditions in your garden over time

For urban gardens and public spaces of the future we need to be thinking more ecologically and creating plant communities that can withstand unpredictable weather. To do this we need to draw inspiration from habitats where plants naturally endure these conditions. Environments such as the Eurasian Steppe, which features a temperate grass and scrubland ecology that endures extremes of heat and cold, can offer guidance for plants that would complement established local flora when making resilient plantings.

Diversity is essential to healthy ecosystems, so maximise the range of plants used, avoiding the homogenisation of good taste and trends that impose the same palette of plants in gardens and parks across the country. Understanding the adaptive strategies of locally growing plants, and using them rather than introduced garden species, can bolster planting schemes by increasing diversity and the mutually beneficial interactions between species. We need to accept successful spontaneous plants (often considered to be weeds) for biodiversity – I'm always in awe of the number of smaller invertebrates that congregate on the native wildflower *Pimpinella saxifraga*. And we also need to use plants of different sizes to help occupy every available niche – for example, for the important and often neglected spaces under trees and taller perennials – the underrated introduced species knotted cranesbill (*Geranium nodosum*) tolerates shade and partial shade, and flowers most of the year.

Plants help to reduce urban heat, rather than absorbing and re-radiating solar energy, as hardscaping does. Trees are important for shading the ground as well as for capturing carbon. But rather than planting single trees, clustering them creates mycorrhizal networks in the soil, assisting trees to support each other.

Introducing lesser-known edible species among ornamentals offers foraging opportunities. Perennials such as garlic mustard offer 'food for free', while trees such as strawberry tree (*Arbutus unedo*) are an ideal scale for city streets and are bountiful in their fruits.

—

Darryl is the author of *Gardening in a Changing World: Plants, People and the Climate Crisis* (Pimpernel Press). darrylmooredesign.com

THE CLIMATE-CHANGE GARDENER

Sally Morgan is a botanist and garden writer

Choosing plants is tricky in these changeable times. Drought-tolerant plants may cope admirably in a heatwave, but how will they enjoy freezing temperatures, torrential rain and waterlogged soils?

Now is the time to look to those adaptable species that may be better placed to cope with topsy-turvy weather. These include shrubs such as butterfly bush (*Buddleja davidii*), Cornelian cherry (*Cornus mas*), dogwood (*C. sanguinea*) and guelder rose (*Viburnum opulus*). Among the herbaceous perennials, look to Turkish sage (*Phlomis russeliana*), globe thistle (*Echinops ritro*), cat mint (*Nepeta faassenii*) and lady's mantle (*Alchemilla mollis*). They love the sun, cope with drought, are hardy and surprisingly tolerant of clay soil that can often become waterlogged in winter.

In contrast, those plants which are more specialist in their requirements are more likely to suffer as the conditions flip from year to year. So, what should we avoid?

Grow less-resilient plants in pots so they can be moved under cover during a cold snap or heavy rainfall, or into the shade during a heatwave

Sadly, climate change is causing problems for roses. They don't thrive in drought, but the real problem is disease. Mild, damp springs encourage fungal pathogens and this has resulted in a surge in black spot and powdery mildew. Moving with the times, rose retailer David Austin has retired the much loved 'Munstead Wood' and is championing varieties that can better withstand the changing environment.

My two pieces of advice: go for diversity by growing as many different types of plant as possible – you may experience failures, but others will survive. And look after your soil – plants growing in a healthy soil cope much better during stressful times.

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An updated edition of Sally Morgan and Kim Stoddart's book *The Climate Change Garden* (Cool Springs Press) is out now. climatechangegarden.uk

LET NATURE BE YOUR GUIDE

Award-winning 'natural navigator' Tristan Gooley can read a landscape and unlock its clues. We challenged him to look at this photograph and tell us where it is, what the terrain is like and if it's going to rain...

Photography *Isabelle Rose Povey*

Trees tell us stories about the land. They reveal so much. The larger central tree in this picture is full of signs. It is a pine, which we can tell because of its shape (the biggest clue to that is that it has few lower branches; mature pine trees are top heavy) and pines tell us we're in a place that gets lots of sunlight – they're commonly seen along the brighter southern edge of woodlands. A pine is a conifer – a sign that the landscape is quite tough for plants to grow in. Deciduous trees thrive in areas with kind soils and easy climates and they will outcompete conifers in these habitats. If we see conifers, it's a tough habitat: either exposed to harsh elements or with acidic soil or both. You are likely to see fewer species of wildflowers and mammals here than in landscapes with deciduous trees. You will also find fewer people, as humans gravitate towards easy elements and kind soils.

This central pine has also been bent over by winds from the left. In the UK, our prevailing winds come from the southwest, which means that southwest is to the left of this picture. This tells us that we are looking close to northwest. This is supported by another strong clue in the same tree. Can you see how the branches on the left side have struggled and been killed by harsh winds? This is an effect called 'flagging'. In windy areas, like coastlines

> Patterns in the water tell us that there is a steady breeze from left to right

and hills, we find that trees lose their branches on their windward side; the surviving branches point downwind, in the same way that a flag does.

There are other hints in this landscape too. The waves are moving from left to right and there are some foamy tops to the waves (or 'white horses'). These patterns in the water tell us that there is a steady breeze from left to right. This is in line with the long-term prevailing wind direction – a sign that the weather is normal for the time of year. However, the visibility is not great – notice how quickly the land fades in colour. Our brain uses this light-scattering effect to automatically gauge distances – without thinking we can tell there is a more distant ridge behind the first one because it is lighter in colour. The worse the visibility on any day, the more moisture there is in the atmosphere. This combined with the gently towering cumulus clouds near the top left of the picture is a sign that showers are possible. ⓑ

Tristan Gooley is the bestselling author of books including *The Natural Navigator*, *How to Read Water* and *The Secret World of Weather*. His new book, *How to Read a Tree: Clues & Patterns from Roots to Leaves* (Hodder), is out in April. naturalnavigator.com

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* The photograph on page 26 was taken on the Isle of Mull in Scotland in early spring

WAYFINDING

Four signs in nature that will help you navigate your day

- Nettles are often a sign of humans as they only thrive in phosphate-rich places, and we have a habit of making places richer in phosphate through fertilisers and sewage. They could mean you're approaching farmland or a village, or if none are obvious, even a settlement from a more ancient time.
- Birds sitting high up in a tree could be a sign of continuing calm weather – they won't perch on the highest branches if gales are on their way. Nests can also act as a compass – in exposed areas they are usually found on the north-east side of a tree, as this is the most sheltered aspect.
- If walking a path with slopes on either side, look to see if one is greener than the other – south-facing slopes have more vegetation. Plants on a southern-facing bank will also typically germinate four days before their north-facing counterparts.
- Just knowing two types of cloud can help you forecast the weather. Cumulonimbus – a very tall, dark giant of a cloud, sometimes with an anvil top – usually means rain is imminent. Cumulus – fluffy little sheep that scoot across the lower part of the sky – are usually found on fair-weather days.

A SPORE SUBJECT

Could the new frontier of gardening involve the marvellous world of fungi? RHS plant pathologist and mycologist Dr Jassy Drakulic tells us why you should bring these incredible species into your garden

These beautiful displays can add a layer to your garden that you didn't know was lacking

***Illustration** Sarah Abbott*

The kingdom of fungi has long been overlooked and underloved. We cultivate and nurture plants (fungi are not plants – more on that later) for their beauty and sensory impressions, but when it comes to fungi we either see them as something unsightly to eradicate or focus on productivity over prettiness – and are all the poorer for it. You might have foraged or grown mushrooms for eating, or sprinkled mycorrhizal fungi into your soil, but have you ever considered gardening with fungi?

Previously thought to be plants because of their immobility, only in the 1960s did mushrooms and co gain recognition for their unique qualities as a separate form of life. In truth, and genetics, they are closer cousins to animals than to plants. We see the similarities in how their cell walls are made of the same polymers that compose crustacean shells, and, like us, they must eat to survive, using digestive enzymes to break down their food before absorbing what they need. Yet despite our closer evolutionary connection with fungi than plants, we are still relatively unacquainted.

Foragers and mycologists celebrate fungi flavours and their incredible qualities, but gardeners have very rarely taken note of their aesthetic character and the interest they can bring to a garden. Fungi are incredible architects. The fruit bodies they produce to release their spores are often mushroom shaped but can also appear as discs, clubs, corals, shelf-like brackets, tiny birds' nests, jellies, balls, stars, crusts, cords, cups, saddles and trumpets. They weave their threadlike cells (hyphae) into a wealth of textures, adorning the surfaces of fruit bodies with spines, sponges, scales, wrinkles, webbing, eyelashes, gills, frills, nets, skirts, collars, rings and more. The closer you look, the more fascinating fungal forms become.

These beautiful displays can add a layer to your garden that you didn't know was lacking, all the while improving the soil and your garden's ecosystem.

Tiny but vivid yellow stagshorn leaps out from the undergrowth. Rich purple brittlegill and delicate pink ballerina waxcap provide romantic appeal. Burnt-orange spectacular rustgill and bloodred webcap are uniquely rousing. Minute green elf cup is mesmerising to hunt for in among the deadwood that its mycelium stains an ethereal shade of teal. Even the simplicity of crisp white elfin saddle against murky leaf litter brings delight.

Fungi can also offer scent – fungal fruit bodies emit chemicals which, at their most appealing, can smell like aniseed, coconut, maple syrup, cinnamon, apricots, almonds, tarragon and cucumber.

Fungi add interest to places where plants will not grow. Springing up from woodchip mulches, they insert a layer of intrigue between ground level and plant cover, or brighten up bare patches after herbaceous plants fade. Laying down logs to demarcate pathways and flowerbeds is already visually appealing, but fungi will supercharge their charm when they flush with fruiting bodies. Upright logs can slot in neatly to fill shady slivers of unused space behind the shed or cold frame.

On top of these visual pleasures, the power of fungal decay will help your garden recruit and retain a rich diversity of wildlife, boosting its environmental impact. While the network of fungal threadlike cells (the mycelium) colonises the woodchip or logs, the tough, dead material will rot down, liberating humic acid that improves soil fertility and regulates soil moisture. As the wood becomes softer, this enables animal biodiversity, like springtails, beetles and worms, to access the spongy spaces and hollows. The fruit bodies themselves create habitats and forage for fauna. Small detritivorous creatures (those that feed on dead plant or animal matter) provide food for garden predators, such as spiders, small mammals and birds, which in turn helps keep herbivores in check.

Textures include spines, sponges, scales, wrinkles, gills, frills, skirts, collars, rings and more

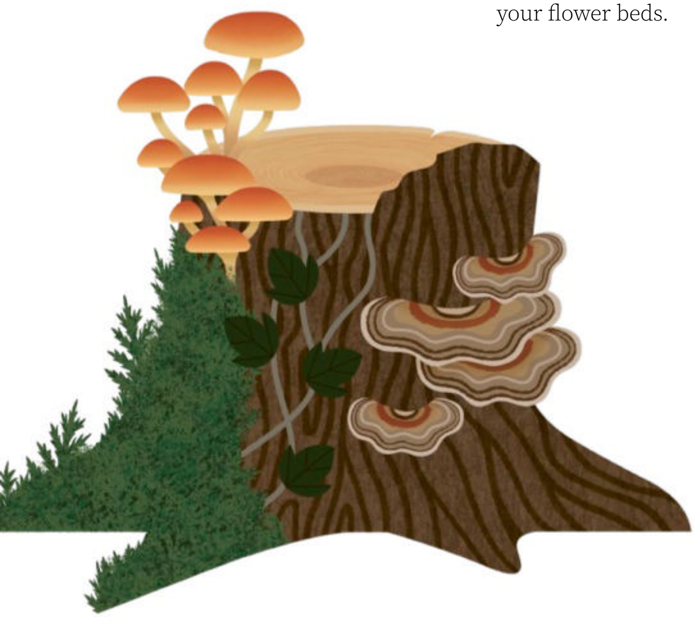
START SPAWNING

It's very possible to grow your own fungi, but beware of grow kits of gourmet or medicinal species, as these will likely have been sourced from far afield: Eastern Europe, North America or Asia. These should not be added to UK gardens as their establishment threatens the preservation of native fungal ecology. Instead, add native species sourced as locally as possible. When starting out, it's best to start with premade spawn, which you can get hold of online. And you can complement your introduced fungi by encouraging wild fungi – incorporate dead wood and leaf mulch into your garden design to provide perfect habitats.

Growing on logs

Log-dwelling species include turkey tail, birch polypore, chicken of the woods, jelly ears, sulphur tuft and velvet shank. Grey, tarragon and summer oysters grow well on logs (or in straw bales or sacks). Most UK fungi prefer hardwoods. Silver birch is relatively easy to come by as it often needs thinning from woodland, and the bright white bark is an attractive backdrop to fungal fruits.

Mycelium needs moisture to grow, so add fungi to wood within a month of it being cut. To inoculate logs, use one-metre long sections and drill a lattice of 8mm holes 4cm deep. Sink 'mushroom dowels' (wooden furniture dowels inoculated with mycelium) into the holes then seal over the wounds with molten beeswax. You can buy kits that include the dowels and the beeswax together online. Try getting creative with installations, using logs and dead wood like sculpture among your flower beds.



Growing in woodchip

Woodchip can be inoculated with natives like sheathed woodtuft, wood blewit or naturalised non-natives like wine cap. For fungi in woodchip, arrange large volumes of sawdust spawn (sawdust that has been inoculated with mycelium) using a mixture of loose crumbs and larger chunks sandwiched between a base layer of soaked cardboard and woodchip that has been soaked in a barrel of water to kill off other microbes. Create areas of woodchip at the front of beds for your fungi to set off the rest of your planting.

Growing in straw sacks

A handful of grain spawn (try oyster mushrooms spawn) can inoculate a sack of straw (buy straw from pet retailers as pellets to be rehydrated). They'll colonise in just a few weeks.

Mushroom maintenance

As long as the fungi and the medium they are growing on are kept moist to the touch, the mycelium will multiply over the coming weeks and months. For logs, piling them up, keeping them in the shade, protecting them with tarpaulin or placing one end on to soil can prevent excessive water loss. Watering in dry weather will help keep them healthy. Then, when seasonal cues are right, fruits will burst forth and the ever-changing spectacle will begin!

Making *scents*

A fragrant garden is a joy to be in, but harness the power of aromatic plants and you'll double the rewards. Aromatherapy expert Julia Lawless explains what to grow and how to distil botanical scent

Photography *Aloha Bonser-Shaw*

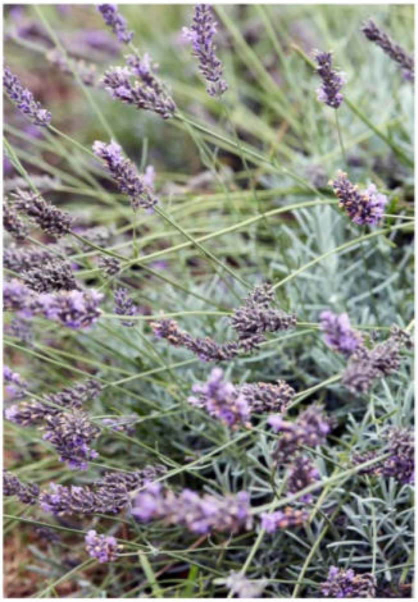
Growing aromatic flowers and herbs for their culinary, medicinal and cosmetic purposes is something I learned from my grandmother and my mother, who had extensive herb gardens and knew all about their therapeutic applications. My mother Kerttu was a Finnish biochemist who specialised in the study of essential oils long before aromatherapy became fashionable. She later set up a company to share her passion for essential oils that gradually developed into our family business, Aqua Oleum, which I now run with my daughter Natasha.

As a keen gardener I have naturally focused on cultivating aromatic plants, especially herbs, which are easy to grow in any space. Their properties are many and varied, and from just a few simple window boxes you can create brilliant recipes for better wellbeing.

LEMON BALM *(MELISSA OFFICINALIS)* is a delightful, citrus-scented Mediterranean herb with soft, bright green leaves and tiny white flowers. It has a long history of medicinal use, most famously as a cure for melancholy and to promote longevity – it was once known as 'the elixir of life' – and is valuable for nervous conditions including anxiety, shock and vertigo. This perennial will thrive in virtually any soil or situation and will happily grow in pots. An essential oil is made from the leaves and flowering tops in minute quantities, and its intense scent has an uplifting and restorative effect. It is one the main ingredients of traditional eau de cologne and a scented water can be made from fresh leaves (p36).

SWEET BASIL *(OCIMUM BASILICUM)* prefers a warm, sheltered site and well-drained soil. Its warm, slightly spicy scent is purifying and reviving. It is also one of the best aromatic nerve tonics for conditions such as anxiety, depression and insomnia. The scent alone can help relieve intellectual fatigue and give the mind greater clarity. An infused massage oil can be prepared from the fresh or dried leaves (p38). A pot of basil growing in the kitchen will also help deter flies.

ROMAN CHAMOMILE *(ANTHEMIS NOBILIS)* is a low-growing evergreen perennial with feathery leaves and sweetly scented, daisy-like flowers. The whole herb has a warm, fruity scent and is well known for its soothing effect. It is easy to grow and best planted in full sun, preferring a well-drained soil. The healing properties of chamomile are too numerous to list, but it is a mild herb that can be used for children's complaints such as insomnia and tummy upsets. The flowers can also be used in fragrant bath sachets, either fresh or dry (p39).



LAVENDER *(LAVENDULA)* is a classic aromatic garden plant. All lavenders like full sun and a well-drained soil, so are best grown in a sheltered position such as a sunny windowsill. It is most popular for use in stress-related disorders such as anxiety, insomnia and headaches. An infused oil is valuable for skin conditions such as eczema, as well as muscle and joint problems (p38). Traditionally, lavender flower water has been used in the production of eau de cologne; it can be made at home from the flesh flowers (p36).

THYME *(THYMUS)* is an ancient medical herb renowned for its pungent scent. Medicinally, thyme has powerful antiviral and antiseptic properties and was once used as an incense to purify temples. Most species are low growing and evergreen, thriving in sunny, dry areas in borders or on paths, but they can also be grown in a window box. The fresh herb can be used in bath bags (p39), or dried sprigs can be laid in linen closets to repel moths and flies. The fresh herb can also be used to make a stimulating infused oil (p38). ➔

ROSE WATER can either be made using fresh rose petals gathered from the garden or dried petals. This recipe uses fresh rose petals: just make sure they are a scented variety. Rose water is used extensively in skincare and is especially good for sensitive skin and for broken capillaries. Rose has always been a mainstay of perfumery work – there is an old saying 'no perfume without rose' – and it is also very valuable in aromatherapy. *Rosa centifolia* is renowned as an aphrodisiac and has a pronounced euphoric and soothing effect on the heart, so is good for grief and depression. You can use this method to make other scented waters such as lavender or lemon balm.

1. Rinse fresh rose petals under cold, running water to remove any dirt. Skip this step if using dry rose petals. Here I used about five handfuls of fresh petals; if using dried petals, use less than half that quantity.

2. Add the petals to a heavy-bottomed saucepan and pour in enough spring water to cover them. Bring the water to a mild simmer, then turn off the heat and let the petals steep for about 10–15 minutes. They will release their colour into the water then turn pale. The rose-tinted effect is stronger when using dried petals.

3. Line a fine mesh sieve with a piece of muslin. Put the sieve over a large measuring jug or bowl to catch the liquid. Pour the rose petal mixture into the sieve, then let the liquid cool.

4. Decant the rose water into an airtight glass bottle. Tinted glass bottles are best, but a clear glass bottle will work if it is kept out of direct sunlight. Don't forget to apply a label with the date.

5. Rose water makes a perfect and classic toner for all skin types. If decanted into a spray bottle, it can also be spritzed onto the skin as a lovely light perfume. Best used within two weeks. ➔

INFUSED OIL is an important form of herbal preparation, usually intended primarily for use on the skin and for massage. My recommended base oil or ‘menstruum’ is light coconut or jojoba oil, as neither deteriorates over time. There are masses of herbs and flowers to choose from when making your own oil infusions, such as thyme, peppermint, sage and lavender, and their respective essential oils can also be added to the blend.

Here I have chosen rosemary for its stimulating herbal scent and anti-inflammatory properties that are good for muscular aches and pains. Rosemary is known to promote hair growth and is also famous as the main ingredient in the traditional ‘Hungary water’, a youth-promoting elixir. Although there are no exact measurements for the oil-to-herb ratio in an infused oil, the aim is to completely cover the plant material with oil. I used about six handfuls of fresh rosemary sprigs, but if using dried sprigs about two handfuls would be enough. Infused oils will have a shelf life of about one year if stored in a cool, dark place.

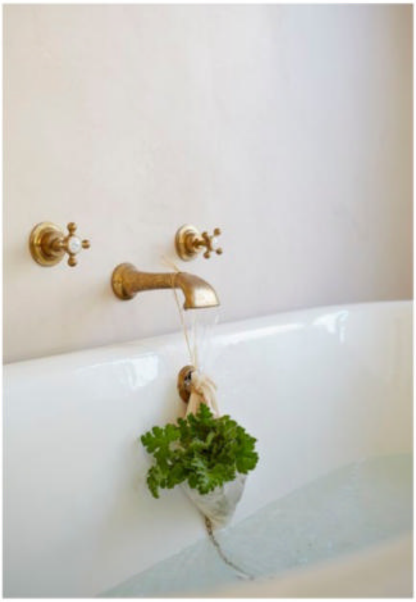
1. If you are gathering the herbs yourself, pick them on a dry day to avoid moisture spoiling the infusion.

2. Place your herbs in a sterilised glass jar, then cover completely with your base oil: I used about 500ml jojoba oil. Seal the lid using greaseproof paper to avoid any contamination.

3. Leave the jar on a sunny windowsill for roughly 4 weeks to infuse, giving it a little shake every few days.

4. After that time, strain out the herbs (using a muslin over a sieve or a fine strainer) and pour into a clean bottle. Seal carefully to avoid contamination and label it.

5. You can add a little to a bath, apply it to your hair (rosemary makes a fantastic conditioning oil) or use it as the base for body or massage oils, adding in essential oils to your liking.



FRAGRANT BATH BAGS are very easy to make. All kinds of scented fresh flowers or leaves can be gathered from the garden. I have used lemon geranium (*Pelargonium* 'Lemon Crisp') leaves as they impart a delicious, sweet scent to the bath and are a favourite with children. Other options include fresh lemon balm or sage, or a combination of your favourite herbs. Another simple technique is to attach a sprig or bunch of aromatic plants to the shower head – I like to use a bunch of eucalyptus leaves for their fresh, invigorating fragrance. The hot steam releases the essential oils, creating a home spa experience (pictured on p34).

1. Pick a bundle of aromatic leaves and flowers fresh from the garden. Remove any hard stems and check there are no insects in the material.

2. Make a simple sachet by tying some ribbon around a small, square piece of muslin cloth. Or use a readymade wide-mesh drawstring bag (you can often buy these for loose-leaf tea). Stuff the bag with aromatic leaves and flowers and secure it at the neck.

3. Tie the bath bag under the hot tap while the bath is running. Soak in the bath and enjoy the aromatic vapours!

Julia Lawless is the author of books including *The Essential Aromatherapy Garden: Growing & Using Scented Plants* (Harper Collins), as well as *Mud, Salt + Medicine: Essential Oil Blends & Recipes for Natural Healing* (Welbeck). aqua-oleum.co.uk

SEEDING NEW IDEAS

Fancy growing something new to bring to the table? Lucy Hutchings has tried and tested countless interesting edibles – and wants to inspire you to branch out too

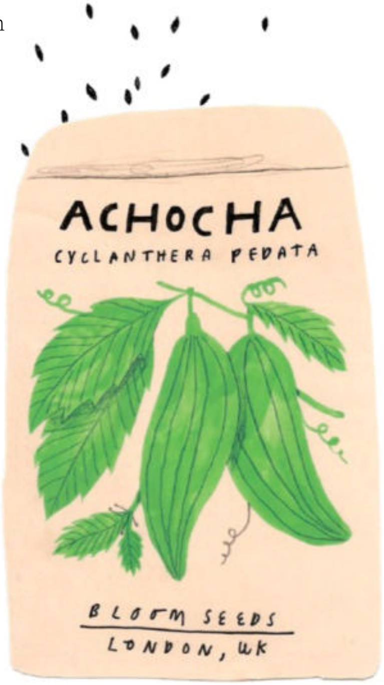
***Illustration** Poppy Loughtman*

There's a reason the old familiar varieties are the ones we keep coming back to: good performers, useful in a kitchen, easy to grow. But I love trying out different crops at my homestead to keep my garden and kitchen table dynamic and vibrant, and often that one-off experiment turns out to be so exceptional and enjoyable that I return to it time and again.

If I could send you all a few seeds (or rhizomes, bulbs or tubers) to try, these would be my grower's choice! They're some of my favourite discoveries. But I urge you to look far and wide for crops that get you excited. Because this selection really only scratches the surface of all the fascinating, beautiful, inspiring and mouthwatering produce that's out there. I haven't even touched on amaranth, snake gourd, dahlias (yes, you can eat them), winter wheat or Poona kheera cucumbers. Simply embrace growing food in whatever way suits you and your garden and never be satisfied with the conventional.

Achocha *Cyclanthera pedata*

Let's kick off with a super-productive gourd called achocha, also known as a slipper gourd due to its elongated shape. The key to making the most of it is knowing how to approach it in the kitchen – and it's worth finding a place in your recipe repertoire for. Its fruit is produced in near overwhelming quantities, forming at almost every leaf axis. This plant offers two potential harvests. You can pick small and young, approximately 2cm long, and treat them like tiny cucumbers – they're great added to salads for that bit of crunch, or I enjoy them pickled like little cornichons. Alternatively, leave them to mature to full size, at which point they will be filled with large black seeds which need to be removed. At this stage, think of them like a green pepper – in their native South America, they are traditionally stuffed and roasted (they are also known as stuffing gourd). Sow indoors from March to April or direct outdoors from May. Their final growing spot needs to be sunny and provide a trellis to climb (and climb it will!). ➔

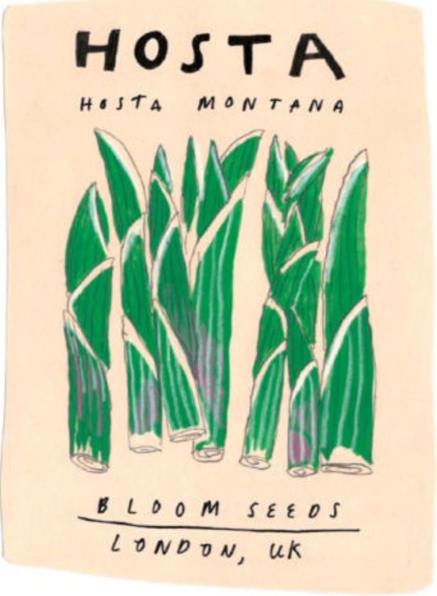


Japanese ginger *Zingiber mioga*

For those who fancy something decidedly ornamental, a great addition to the flower border is Japanese ginger (or mioga ginger). It's a gorgeous foliage plant in its own right, adding lush, spiky texture to a planting plan. However, it also offers up not one but two very special harvests, both of which are considered delicacies in parts of East Asia. In spring, the newly emerging shoots can be harvested from an established clump in much the same way as asparagus and should be treated in a similar fashion in the kitchen. It's a beautiful, tender green vegetable with a sophisticated punch of gingery flavour. In late summer and into autumn, orchid-like flowers are produced. Unusually, they emerge directly from the ground in a roughly 30cm radius around the plant. As they have little to add by way of beauty, you can slice them away from the ground with a sharp knife while still in bud form. They are crisp and tender and utterly delectable – and particularly good when prepared as an alternative to sushi ginger. To grow, buy as plants or propagate rhizomes and plant in spring either straight in the ground or in pots; pick a place in sun or partial shade.

Purpleleaf false shamrock *Oxalis triangularis*

Another member of the *Oxalis* genus, this is often grown as a houseplant, but is just as happy outside in a sheltered spot, although it doesn't survive a frost. That deep purple foliage is as appetising as it is striking, with a flavour similar to sour apple. It excels as a garnish to elevate both sweet and savoury dishes. Buy a potted plant or plant bulbs in pots indoors and transplant outdoors in spring. You can also plant bulbs direct in spring after frosts have passed. Prefers partial shade.



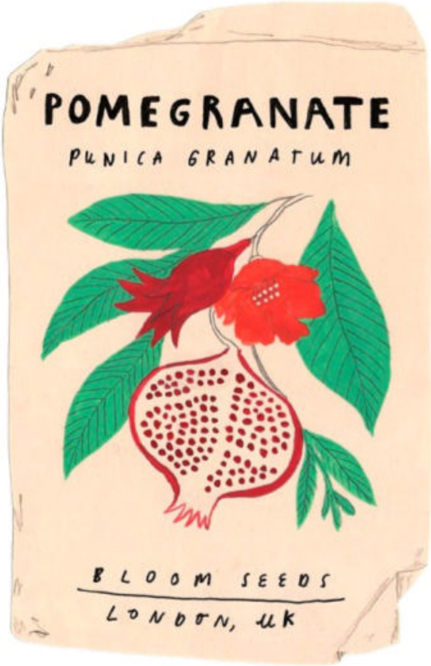
Hosta *Hosta* spp.

This is another asparagus alternative that already grows in many gardens but is rarely enjoyed as a flavoursome edible. I can almost hear the collective gasp of horror from the hosta fanciers out there, but trust me when I say there is a good reason that slugs descend on this plant en masse every spring. It's those first spiky shoots that you're after, and an established clump can be picked from every year without damaging the beautiful display that will follow. If you need to be convinced, I would go so far as to say it is superior in flavour and texture to asparagus. Plant potted plants in spring or autumn, divide a friend's plant in autumn or early spring, or grow from seed sown in spring. Most hostas prefer partial shade.

> **I can almost hear the collective gasp of horror from the hosta fanciers out there, but there's a reason slugs descend on this plant**

Pomegranate *Punica granatum*

Pomegranates are a crop associated with warmer climes than the UK, but this beautiful tree is hardier than most expect it to be. Both the full size and dwarf cultivars will put on a dazzling display of vivid, coral-red blossoms from early summer all the way through until the first frost. You can grow from seed, but potted trees are obviously far speedier. Give it a sheltered, sunny spot – or better yet a home inside a greenhouse or polytunnel – and it will reward you with a healthy crop of ruby-filled fruits.



Oca *Oxalis tuberosa*

For anyone wanting to branch out from the humble spud, this member of the oxalis family will pretty much take care of itself once planted and will provide a satisfying mound of purple-green, clover-like foliage that is untroubled by most garden pests and diseases. Chit tubers in early spring, pot up indoors while you wait for frost to pass, then plant outside in full sun (usually around May). Tubers form late in the season, so self-control is required but will be richly rewarded. Once frost has killed off the top growth, a sift through the soil surface will provide you with a harvest of pink, purple, yellow or orange tubers in such shockingly bright colours it can be hard to believe they are real. Treat just like a new potato and enjoy the lemony fragrant flavour.

Lucy Hutchings is a homesteader, writer and photographer growing heirloom varieties in Suffolk. @shegrowsveg | cedarwoodhomestead.com

Delayed gratification

Sowing biennials asks the patient gardener to be even more patient, but the pay-off is worth it, says cut-flower grower Helier Bowling

Much of gardening involves patience and biennials are a true test of that. But a garden wouldn't be complete without a few of these stunners. For those unfamiliar with biennials, let me explain: biennials are plants that take two years to complete their growth cycle – that is, germinating, growing foliage, flowering, setting seed and dying. Grown from seeds sown and germinated in the warmth of summer, they bide their time through the cold of the winter, becoming strong and vigorous before bursting into flower the following year in spring and early summer. Sometimes short-lived perennials are treated in this way too. Before you shake your head and pass, let me try to persuade you to give it a go and wait it out.

Providing early flowers for cutting (most biennials make great cut flowers), biennials can fill that May gap in the garden before your summer flowers start blooming. Your shady borders will light up with white and apricot foxgloves, you'll be picking bunches and bunches of sweet Williams all summer, and the statuesque white and purple sweet rocket will be giving all the pollinators in your garden a welcome head start.

Most are a doddle to grow and many are prolific self seeders. And since they do take their sweet time, you may even forget about them and get a nice surprise as they pop up.

How to grow

Start your biennials in June or July. Sow into a tray, cell modules or 9cm pots filled with peat-free compost, and water well. I leave mine somewhere warm but sheltered outside to germinate. It's important that the soil doesn't dry out but try not to overwater them.

Leave them to become seedlings with a few true leaves (that look like the parent plant). Depending on how densely you sowed them, you can either thin them out and pot them on, or leave them to bulk up as they are. Plant them out into the ground where you want them to flower by mid-September. They'll continue to grow roots and will be happy all through the winter – they are robust things. You could also have a go sowing directly into containers or beds.

Some gardeners like to do a second sowing in autumn. Ideally, though, the seeds need the warm summer period in order to flower well the following year. If you do want to have a go in autumn, sprinkle seeds directly on the soil – that's how nature does it! Just note that you will likely end up waiting even longer for flowers.

PLAY THE WAITING GAME

Eight biennials to sow now and enjoy later

SWEET WILLIAM *DIANTHUS BARBATUS*

These provide vases of sturdy-stemmed, scented flowers all summer long and there are so many colours to choose from. Try one of my favourites, 'Auricula Eyed', which offers up many shades of pink. Plant out in full sun.

SWEET ROCKET *HESPERIS MATRONALIS*

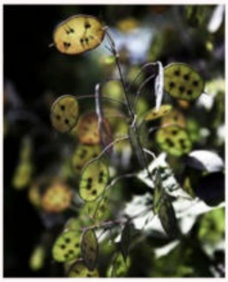
Bees love this, plus it's great in a vase and best of all should come back the following year after flowering. Happy in partial shade or full sun, it looks great at the back of borders as it can grow big!

ANGELICA *ANGELICA ARCHANGELICA*

This impressive plant will give you some architectural wow factor in a moist, shady spot. Plus you get edible stems (which, famously, are delicious candied) and leaves that can be used in tea or to flavour desserts.

FOXGLOVES *DIGITALIS*

There are so many gorgeous foxgloves to grow. Look out for 'Alba' (white) and 'Sutton's Apricot'. Plant in a moist, shady spot; cut back the flower spikes after flowering and you might get a second set of blooms.



HONESTY *LUNARIA*

You'll get scented purple or white flowers in summer; let them develop into flat seed pods which turn green to silver then translucent and papery – just gorgeous in dried flower arrangements.

WALLFLOWER *ERYSIMUM*

The first of the biennials to flower, these make perfect bedfellows with tulips. Two excellent options are 'Ivory white' or the flame-coloured 'Fire King'. Plant out in full sun.

CANTERBURY BELLS *CAMPANULA*

With old-fashioned blue, white and pink bell-shaped flowers, this is a pretty cottage-garden plant that will light up borders in summer. Like foxgloves, it likes a little shade.

GRANNY'S BONNET *AQUILEGIA*

Choose from many soft and pretty shades as well as single and double flower types. Grow in a sunny or partially shady area and enjoy delicate blooms come mid-spring.

Helier Bowling runs courses in cut flower growing. @garden_goddess_uk | sowsandgrows.co.uk

BOTTOM, FAR LEFT AND RIGHT © Kim Lightbody | TOP, FAR LEFT AND RIGHT © Sarah Pyke

'UNFATHOMABLY VENERABLE, **DURABLE, PERMANENT…'**

Photography *Claire Takacs*

Conifers have a reputation for being no more than suburban neighbour-shields, but they've been maligned for too long, argues their most ardent fan, gardener Andrew Salter

I love conifers. They sock me right in the gut.

First, nomenclature. A conifer – from *conus* (cone) and *ferre* (to carry) – is a woody plant that produces cones. This elementary definition itself hints at one great charm of many.

They have a staggering seniority, which we instinctively read in their gnarly and indomitable appearance: rigid, strong and stalwart. It is tempting to stumble fantastical and even ascribe a certain sagacity or ancient wisdom to these plants. Cones might remain attached to a parent tree for a full decade, their archaic structural mechanisms expanding and constricting with passing seasons, temperatures and the availability of pollen, protecting or exposing nascent seeds both before and after inconspicuously falling to the ground. Germination can then take years. Early growth is often slow. These are not ephemerals. They are abiding giants, thriving in some of our coldest, most inhospitable environments. Certain fully grown specimens are estimated to be more than a thousand years of age. This is of note.

My own interest in conifers, as indeed in all plants, centres on their potential in my garden in Kent – an absurdly grandiose admission in the discussion of forms of life older than dinosaurs – but to me my garden is meaningful. Though shaggy and informal in appearance, basic design fundamentals are at work in my small plot, and effective design often relies on a play of stark contrasts; a satisfying fulcrum can be found, in terms of layout, somewhere on a spectrum of extremes. Conifers provide extremes on a number of dimensions.

One, at the risk of repetition, is to be found in their very character; unfathomably venerable, durable, permanent. It is thrilling to see scabrous-looking coniferous plants with the potential to outlive me, my house, my garden and all of the cultural norms I was born into, standing in tandem with an unruly discotheque of cosmos, larkspur, cornflowers or poppies. The acute disparity between these distinct plant types, set together, is gratifying. The neighbouring annuals will clamour and dazzle for a few weeks, attracting oglers (people) and consumers (wildlife), then perish forevermore a short while after Halloween. The apprehension of their life cycles is not theoretical or intellectual – it's self-evident from their frailty, froth, bright and saturated inflorescence, and wanton flirtation. The contrast in tone between the enduring and the fleeting, the seemingly ancient and juvenile, the resolute and the fragile, the craggy and the gleaming, is palpable and exhilarating.

Also, colour. Forms of *Picea pungens*, *Abies pinsapo*, *Cedrus atlantica* and *Cupressus arizonica* are really, truly blue, in their entirety, every day of every year. Likewise conifers offer abundant intense, clear yellows and even some bruised maroons and purples. ➔

Pinus sylvestris 'Aurea' summers a verdant gentle green then, by the depths of winter, the entire tree has altered to brilliant bright yellow (itself humbled, in my garden, by the almost fluorescent *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Karaca', *Larix decidua* 'Lucek' and *Pinus contorta* 'Chief Joseph'). Particularly if in thrall to today's popular 'naturalistic' herbaceous orgy, an unseasoned home gardener risks gazing out for much of the year at masses of unintelligible soft green splodge, dutifully awaiting a flowery climax in late summer and autumn. Evergreen foliage comprising hues other than mid-green is precious.

There are of course exquisite reminders of the immense and diverse scope of beauty conferred on a landscape by a stand of conifers – the moonlit silhouettes of crooked pines against a spectral charcoal-black horizon or a fragrant ancient forest of cedar – but my task here is to vouch for their garden applicability which, to me, is all about mixing. As with people, I like good, or more importantly interesting, mixers. My own use of conifers takes place within the classic 'mixed' border, where trees, shrubs, biennials, bulbs, annuals and herbaceous perennials all combine to form a varied and evocative patchwork.

I concede that garden use of conifers does, indeed, at times require courageous pruning. For centuries pines in particular have been subjected to fastidious and pristine moulding, particularly in the gardens of Japan. *Cryptomeria japonica* and *Juniperus chinensis* are keenly associated with prescribed, time-honoured techniques of pruning but, in my own garden, and perhaps in yours, experimentation occurs. Sitting in observation, paying heed, noticing, is reasonable preparation. With sufficient time and thought a single tree can gradually take on the appearance of two, or three, all intertwined, and a few bold cuts – usually close to the trunk and therefore making significant alterations – can reveal previously unseen individuality, as well as reducing scale and span and restoring harmony in the flower border. Conifers, though, are inclined to favour one strong vertical trunk from which branches divert, and removing the leader, shifting auxin away from the apical tip, will be a necessity. It's a move likely to make the domestic secateur-

> **It is thrilling to see scabrous-looking coniferous plants with the potential to outlive me, my house, my garden and all of the cultural norms I was born into**

Opposite
Cryptomeria japonica 'Rasen-sugi'

Above left
Abies concolor 'Compacta'

Above right
Picea pungens 'Globosa'

wielder wince, but hopefully it's winter and nobody is around to witness the abomination. The tree invariably looks a sad, disfigured mess. But with luck, and time, developments commence. Cypresses spread widthways as if preparing for flight. Pendulous larches, or cedars, spill out into dangly fractal fountains. A favourite of mine, *C. japonica* 'Rasen-sugi', actually begins to look *less* eccentric. The appeal of such perversions is, indeed, a bit subjective.

Conifers are unfashionable. This, itself a reason to veer in their direction, can be attributed to garden (over) use characterised by predictable, formulaic, unimaginative, careless and inappropriate tropes and selections. Any class of plant would, and does, suffer when burdened with such treatment. Fashions are inescapably harmful as they spread, drawing cardinal ingredients, combinations and ideas into misunderstood and pedestrian waters, particularly in gardening circles when we settle for plant selections made for, and sold in, middle-of-the-road retail outlets. Plants (or anything else) that can set the soul on fire will seldom be available at the local business park. Special growers offer special plants. Even in the very finest conifer nurseries a good find is rare, and is an ecstatic discovery. Ever-improving cultivars are being sourced and named in the boreal forests of Pakistan, Finland, Kyrgyzstan, Alaska and other wild places.

I opened this article with a declaration: I love conifers. Please permit an amendment. Actually I love ecstatic discoveries, and the most intense, monstrous, vivid and creepy conifers audaciously fit this bill. They are not all Christmas trees, or Leyland cypress neighbour concealers. Please be selective, critical and open. Be mindful of scale, composition and time. Search out the ecstatic and revel in it. Discount fashion. I love ecstatic conifers.

RED AND YELLOW AND PINK AND GREEN...

… plus purple and orange and blue. Can you taste the rainbow? Allotment pro Rob Smith refuses to settle for beige fruit and veg

If you asked someone what colour raspberries are, they would undoubtedly say red. Most fruit and vegetables come in predictable hues: carrots are orange, cauliflowers are white, lettuces are green. But they really don't have to be. Broadening the colour spectrum of your produce will not only give you more ornamental and diverse edible plants, it's also a surefire way to encourage children to get their hands in the dirt and connect with where their meals come from. I've chosen a few fun options here, but there really is a whole spectrum of colour out there, from purple cauliflowers to kaleidoscopic chard.

Illustration *Becky Mann*

CARROT

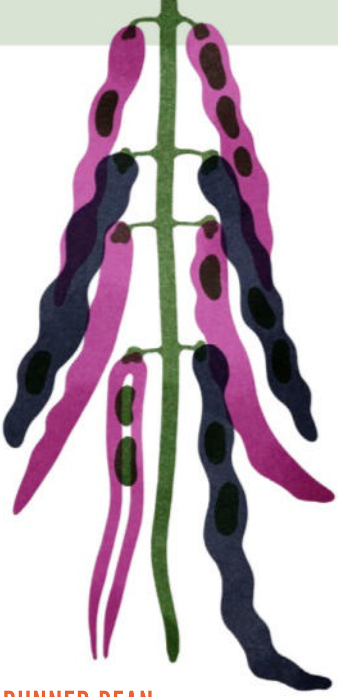
Wild carrots were originally yellow and purple rooted, with white carrots bred in the 1800s to feed cattle. The orange carrots we know and love are apparently naturally occurring, but the story goes that Dutch farmers grew these above all others in patriotic support for William of Orange. To mix it up, try ‘Gold Nugget’ for its bright, golden-yellow root. Sown and grown just like its orange cousin, this sunshine-yellow veg looks great when cooked as it keeps its vibrant colour. Carrots are ready to harvest from about 12 weeks after sowing: pick them as soon as they’re ready (don’t wait for them to grow big) for maximum flavour. If you’re short on space, grow in an old bucket in a sunny spot.

RASPBERRY

‘All Gold’ is a fantastic golden-orange raspberry with an even more delicious flavour than its traditional red relatives. This variety is on the taller side at 150cm, perfect for producing lots of fruit from a smaller plot, as it uses vertical space and doesn’t need any support. ‘All Gold’ is harvested in autumn, so plant alongside a red summer-fruiting raspberry for a long supply. Cut the entire plant to the ground in February to ensure a great repeat crop of golden fruit from August to October.

TOMATO

Orange and yellow tomatoes are increasingly available in supermarkets, but there are more shades to explore. Modern breeders have started to create anthocyanin varieties, which have a dark blue, almost black colouration to the skin. This is the same compound found in blueberries and is reputed to have a whole host of health benefits. A favourite is ‘Gargamel’, which has dark shoulders and flame-like orange streaks, and it’s absolutely delicious! Sweet, fruity and with a balanced acidity, this cordon-type (vine) tomato is great to grow trained up a support in the greenhouse.



RUNNER BEAN

Most beans – whether they come with red, white or bicoloured flowers – have one thing in common: green pods. But not if you welcome ‘Black Knight’ into your life. Producing pods that change from green to a dark purple-black, this heirloom variety is said to have been grown by Edmund Knight, bishop of Shrewsbury, and saved by his congregants in the late 1800s. After its red flowers have finished, the beans are produced in striking profusion against green leaves: perfect when it comes to picking, as you don’t miss a single one. Lightly steamed or stir fried, the beans will retain some of their colour; however if you leave them to produce seed, you can use them as dried beans and be rewarded with black and bright-pink-speckled beauties. Start your beans off indoors in late spring. In late June, move them outdoors to a bright, sheltered spot, giving them something to climb up.

'Tickled Pink' is a bright red apple with a gorgeous rosy flesh hiding under the surface ready to surprise those who take a bite

APPLE

No matter the taste, be it sharp or sweet, apples mostly have white flesh. 'Tickled Pink', however, is a bright red apple with a gorgeous rosy pink flesh hiding under the surface ready to surprise those who take a bite. Sweet and with a good balance of acidity, it's a fantastic variety for juicing, as the result is delightfully blushed. Grown against a fence or wall as an espalier, 'Tickled Pink' rewards with gorgeous pink spring flowers; it likes deep, neutral soil and a sheltered, sunny spot for the best yield come autumn.

POTATO

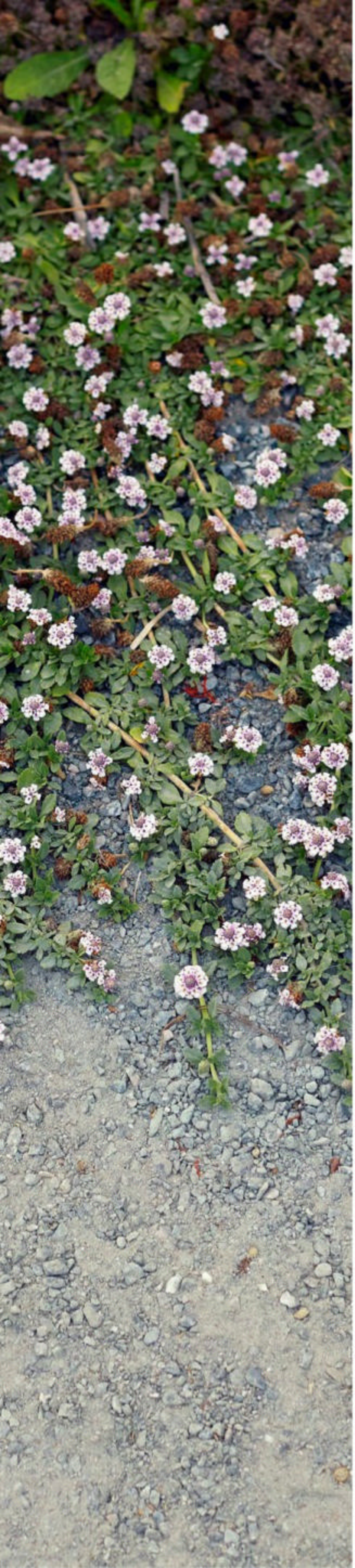
'Highland Burgundy' is a delicious red-skinned variety that's been available since the 1930s, but has been pushed to the sidelines by the standard roasters, boilers and bakers. This heritage spud not only has red skin, but the internal flesh is also rosy. If you want to intrigue the kids, use these to make red chips, as well as beautiful crisps. They are grown in the same way as any potato, in narrow trenches or deep tubs. If you're planting in a tub, regularly add compost as the stems grow, to protect the new foliage.

BEETROOT

Longstanding heirloom varieties of beetroot can be quite earthy tasting, with a strong flavour that's not to everyone's taste. However, some of the more modern cultivars have been bred to increase sweetness, with 'Golden Eye' standing out from the crowd. This sun-yellow root has orange rings running through the inside. Unlike purple types, 'Golden Eye' doesn't bleed its coloured juice when cut, so it won't lead to stained hands and clothes. It makes a great pickle, but is even better when roasted and added to salads when cooled. Easily grown in containers or the ground, its sowing time is flexible (from late February and into June). Pull up once the roots reach the size of a golf ball.

Rob Smith is a kitchen gardener and broadcaster. @robsallotment | robsallotment.com

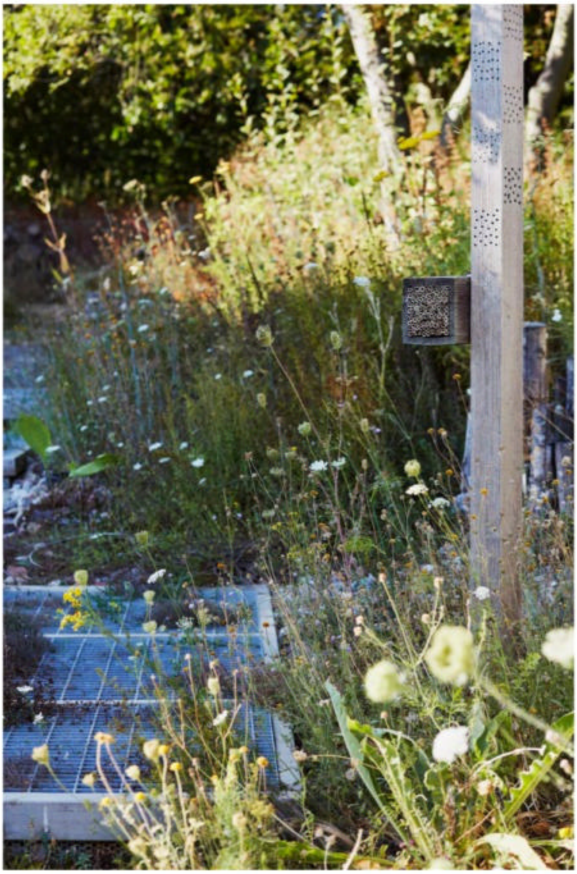
NATURAL WONDERS
STORIES FROM A WILD WORLD ➔



Photography Aloha Bonser-Shaw

Life from the ruins

Landscape consultant Jo McKerr created her garden on a crumbling post-industrial site. She visits the man who inspired her – brownfield gardening pioneer John Little – for a walk through his own verdant rubble in Essex



Sometimes it takes a pathfinder, an iconoclast, someone from outside the conventional sphere to shine a light on a new idea and raise support for it. In the past five years there has been a radical shift toward using brownfield sites as inspiration for a new type of sustainable wildlife gardening. I went to see the garden that inspired this revolution.

Down an easily missed track in rural Essex, within sight of the docks and surrounded by monoculture farmland, sits Hilldrop, a four-acre garden belonging to John Little. As I drive down the narrow road I feel like I'm entering another world: the carnival of joyful plant colour and wildlife activity is in stark contrast to the bland landscape around. Echiums tower above dancing meadows of coreopsis, fennel, chicory and salvias; native wildflowers bloom cheek-by-jowl with half-hardy plants you expect to see in coastal Cornwall rather than on a clay site in Essex.

As I enter the garden it becomes clear the plants are growing in mounds of colourful substrates held within rusted steel shapes: one glittering, disco ball-like hump turns out to be a mixture of crushed glass and ceramics. A small pile of sand is literally humming and bopping with ground-nesting ivy bees, while a half-submerged car is home to hops trailing over and under. Posts of dead wood drilled with holes for solitary bees act as modernist pieces of garden sculpture. This is a 'brownfield garden' – one that grows on land that has been previously developed and built on, or uses waste industrial materials as growing media. It is a way of gardening that has deeply influenced me, as well as many others in the horticultural industry, and I believe it is set to radically change how we all conceive and grow our domestic and public gardens.

John's journey into what's now known as brownfield gardening began the same way as mine: with the purchase of a house and some land and a burning desire to make a garden that increases biodiversity and looks good. John was inspired by a childhood spent in Essex, surrounded by brownfield sites that then became Sites of Special Scientific Interest and nature reserves – places like Canvey Wick, a former industrial zone turned reserve on the flatlands of the Thames estuary, now described as a 'brownfield rainforest' due to the incredible density of biodiversity per square foot. John tells me that discovering the value of this land to invertebrates and wildflowers fuelled his amateur fascination with brownfield landscapes, one that ultimately turned into a career.

'I was lucky enough to be able to build my own house and decided to give it a green roof. That was how I started making green roof gardens and wildlife gardens for others. But it wasn't until I returned to a green roof on a garage that I had completed a couple of years beforehand

Growing mediums as diverse as crushed toilets, glass and concrete have been sculpted into an undulating topography

that I had a eureka moment,' says John, who is the founder of the Grass Roof Company. 'The whole of the surrounding car park had organically become the most amazing meadow, humming with life, without anyone gardening it or spending money. Plants had spread and colonised the cracked asphalt and gravel. It was incredible.'

Post-industrial sites are now five times more likely to become SSSIs than greenfield sites and 12 to 15 percent of the nation's scarce invertebrates are found on brownfield sites. What makes these landscapes so nature rich is a surprising combination of low-nutrient soils (ideal for many wildflowers), a mosaic of different conditions that promote differing plant growth patterns, and human disturbance. It's one thing holding up a place like Canvey Wick as an example of nature's ability to thrive on brownfield sites, it's quite another to recreate the features of these previously built-up areas within a gardened landscape. It's something John has achieved brilliantly and the results are not only ecologically enriching – 'there's been a 30 percent increase in the diversity of invertebrates since the garden's creation,' says John – and visually pleasing, but a blueprint for an increasing number of brownfield developments.

The major intervention John made when he started gardening here 15 years ago was introducing construction waste as a medium in which to grow plants. Having a builder for a brother, as well as a good relationship with a friendly haulage firm, enabled him to experiment with growing mediums as diverse as crushed toilets, glass, brick, concrete, hoggin (a mix of gravel, sand and clay) and various sands. These have been mounded and sculpted into an undulating topography of unconventional beds, borders and paths on top of a clay hillside. We wander past a chalk mound – 'waste from Tate & Lyle Sugars' – along a long gabion wall filled with stones to 'trial different types of niche habitat' and stop by a sand planter made from drainage pipes surrounded by perforated steel. The alternative substrates are free draining and low in nutrients, allowing a much greater diversity of plants from a wider range of habitats and regions than an average compost-rich garden. This variety in turn attracts a greater diversity of insects. Regular gardening practices – removing vegetation, sowing new species – keeps the space dynamic and maintains the diversity of flowering plants. John sees this as totally doable for the average gardener.

'The substrates are sterile, free of weed seeds and don't hold enough of the good stuff to make competitive weeds like nettles a problem. I've never watered the garden, either. In terms of effort, gardening a brownfield garden is straightforward, and easier than having the pressure of fertile

soil – though you do still have to pull out the odd weed.'

The idea that nature can swiftly overcome and regenerate even in the most exploited places is an attractive one

Reassuring. And it looks good, too. The aesthetic of abandoned post-industrial land reclaimed by nature has become a trend in recent years, even reaching the Chelsea Flower Show last year in Brewin Dolphin's garden designed by Paul Hervey-Brookes – the designer wanted to show how possible it is to grow a garden in 'even the most challenging of urban settings' and on contaminated soil. The idea that nature can swiftly overcome and regenerate even in the harshest conditions and in the most exploited places is an attractive one. Many of the most successful parks are now created on former industrial sites and take advantage of the brownfield conditions to create biodiverse as well as striking landscapes. Public gardens such as Le Jardin du Tiers Paysage designed by Gilles Clement on the site of a former submarine base in Saint-Nazaire, France, or the High Line, built on a freight rail line in Manhattan with planting by Piet Oudolf, are good examples (also see p92). Instead of being eyesores or places to redevelop, the compromised, polluted, derelict land in the heart of our urban sprawl can be reimagined as wildlife gardens and wellbeing havens.

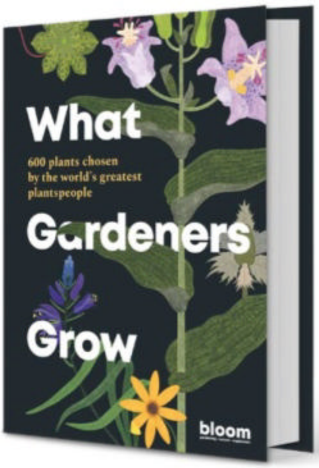
One of the greatest assets that this form of garden making delivers is that it is comparatively low cost. It was a lack of budget, ambition and a post-industrial site filled with rubble and depleted soils that led me on my own brownfield garden journey in Somerset. Removing spoil and then importing topsoil was an expense that I couldn't afford both financially and also from a sustainability point of view. Crushing the waste and landscaping it into slopes has allowed me to shape a garden with a mosaic of planting conditions and habitats, which has upped my gardening satisfaction as well as biodiversity. Low-nutrient soils meant that I had to start plants young, from seed or as young saplings, so they could better adapt to the stressful conditions. While this means you can't achieve a mature garden quickly, you do get instant colour from wildflowers for a very low cost. Growing from seed gives you the bonus of having a much greater variety of plants to choose from and, because seeds are cheap, if you don't like something, you can edit it out.

Gardens inspired by these post-industrial landscapes, or even created on them, have huge potential to be used in both public spaces and private gardens and I believe this is their principal advantage. If we can inject a much-needed nature connection into our urban, sanitised landscapes, then we can start to 'wild' our cities, streets and homes. There will no longer be a need to search out the ever-diminishing pockets of 'green' – it will become, once more, part of the architecture of our everyday.

What gardeners grow

Illustration Melanie Gandyra

We asked the world's greatest plantspeople to choose their favourite plant. The result? More than 250 gardeners told us about more than 600 of their most prized plants (complete with growing tips) and we turned it into a beautiful, encyclopedic book. *What Gardeners Grow* is out now, and here's a tiny taster...


What
600 plants chosen by the world's greatest plantspeople
Gardeners
Grow
bloom

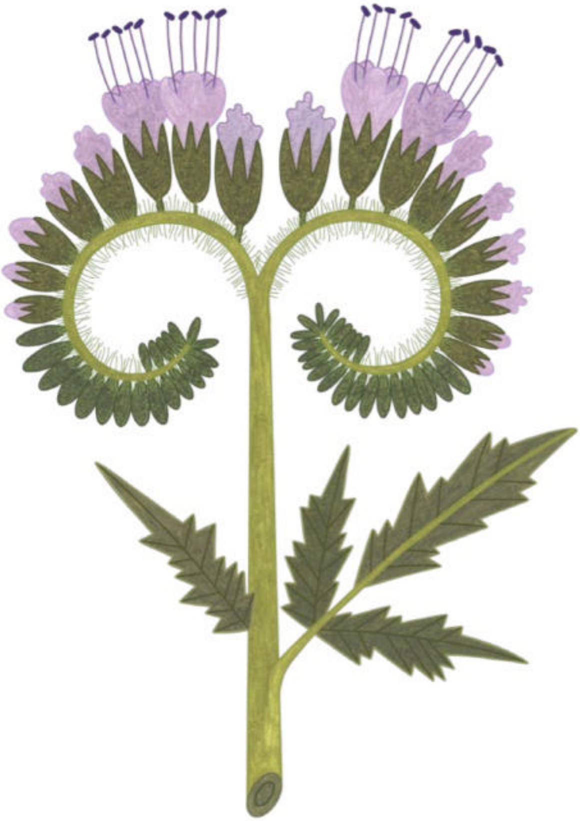
SARAH MEAD
Head gardener, Yeo Valley Organic Garden, Bristol

Phacelia tanacetifolia / Fiddleneck

Phacelia is normally sold as a green manure, but it is so much more than that. Standing at over 1m high, it has the most extraordinary and dynamic electric-blue flowers that curve back on themselves. Hoverflies, lacewings, ladybirds and bees go mad for it. What's more, you can grow it cheaply from seed pretty much any time of year. It flowers roughly eight weeks after sowing, is hardy and tolerates almost all soil types. It also makes a great cut flower and once it has finished flowering, you can dig it in to improve the soil structure.

Type
Annual
Flowering
Summer, autumn
Height/spread
1m x 50cm
Position
Full sun
Soil
Well-drained
Hardiness
USDA 8b/9a / RHS H4

GROW A great plant for successional sowing. Direct sow every eight weeks and you should get a six-week flowering period.



MARTIN CRAWFORD
Founder, Agroforestry Research Trust, Devon

Type
Deciduous fern
Height/spread
1.5m x 2.5m
Position
Part shade
Soil
Moist, well-drained
Hardiness
USDA 7b/8a / RHS H5

Matteuccia struthiopteris / Shuttlecock fern

This is the first fresh edible we pick from our forest gardens in late winter and early spring. It has excellent flavoured shoots (known as 'fiddleheads'), lush green fronds in spring (which is why it has been used ornamentally for a long time), and is early into growth (mid-March in Devon). It spreads slowly via rhizomes, but not if you harvest lots for cooking.

GROW Easy to grow given the right conditions of moist soil and some shade. Sheltered beneath deciduous trees or shrubs is best, but will grow in the sun if the soil stays moist. ➔

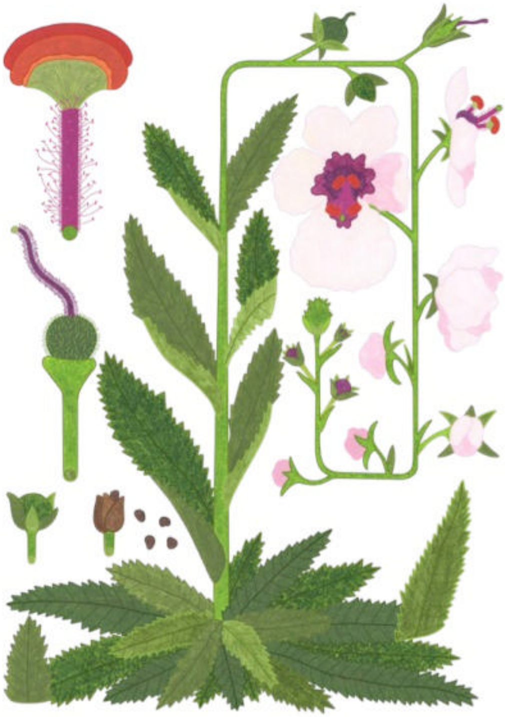
ARNE MAYNARD
Garden designer,
Monmouthshire, Wales

Verbascum blattaria f. *albiflorum* / White-flowered moth mullein

This wonderful blush-white verbascum is a fabulous anchor plant in the border. We tend to plant it annually, but given time to establish, it will naturally self-sow, creating a soft veil-like haze that brings the whole planting scheme together. It has crinkly, lobed, dark green leaves producing an evergreen basal rosette. A single flower spike stands at about 1.2m tall with widely spaced white flowers that have pink- and purple-flushed centres.

Type
Biennial
Flowering
Summer, autumn
Height/spread
1.5m x 50cm
Position
Full sun, exposed
Soil
Well-drained, alkaline
Hardiness
USDA 6b/7a / RHS H6

GROW Allow to self-sow and thread through the border.



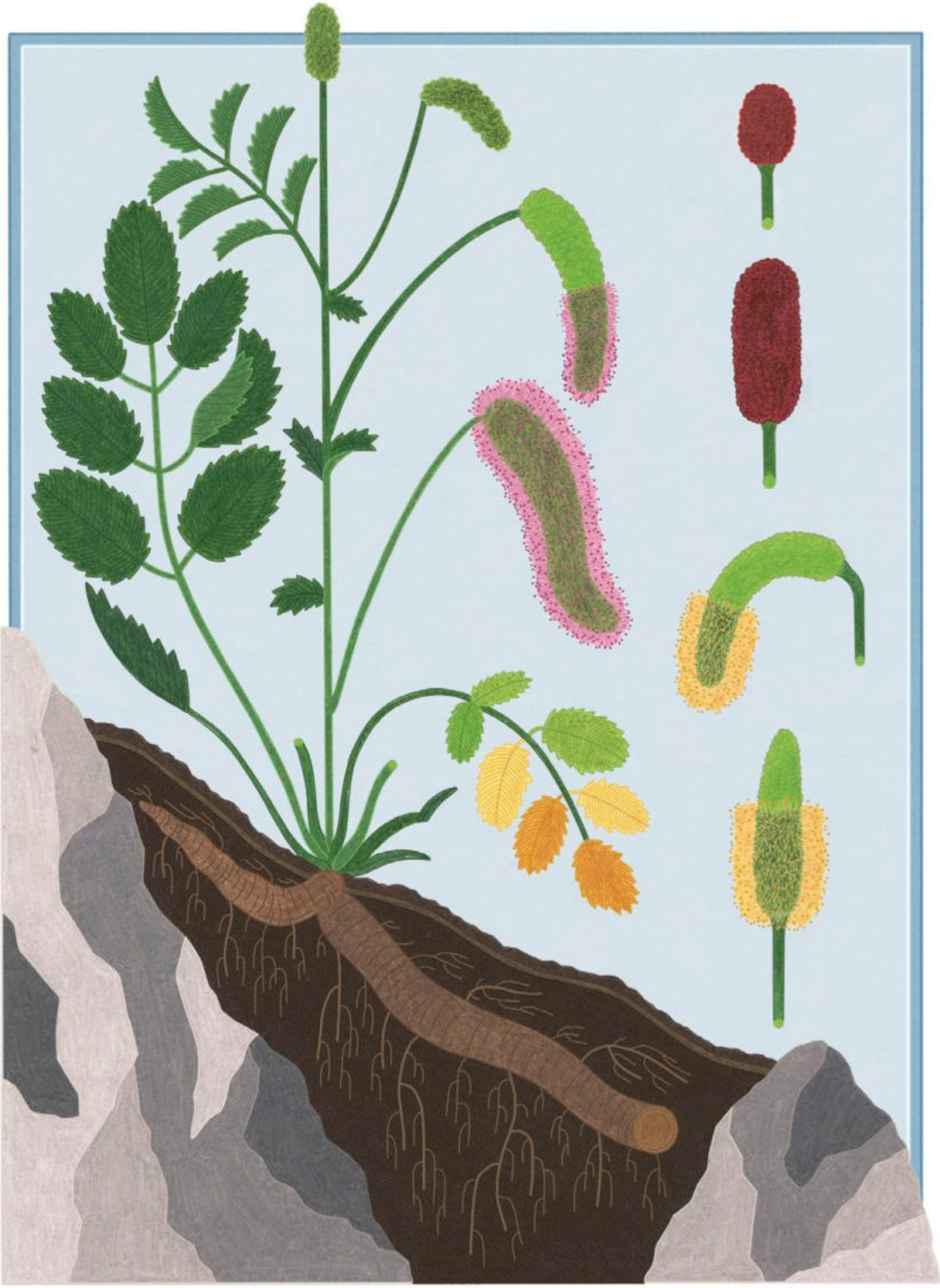
MIDORI SHINTANI
Head gardener, Tokachi Millennium Forest,
Hokkaido, Japan

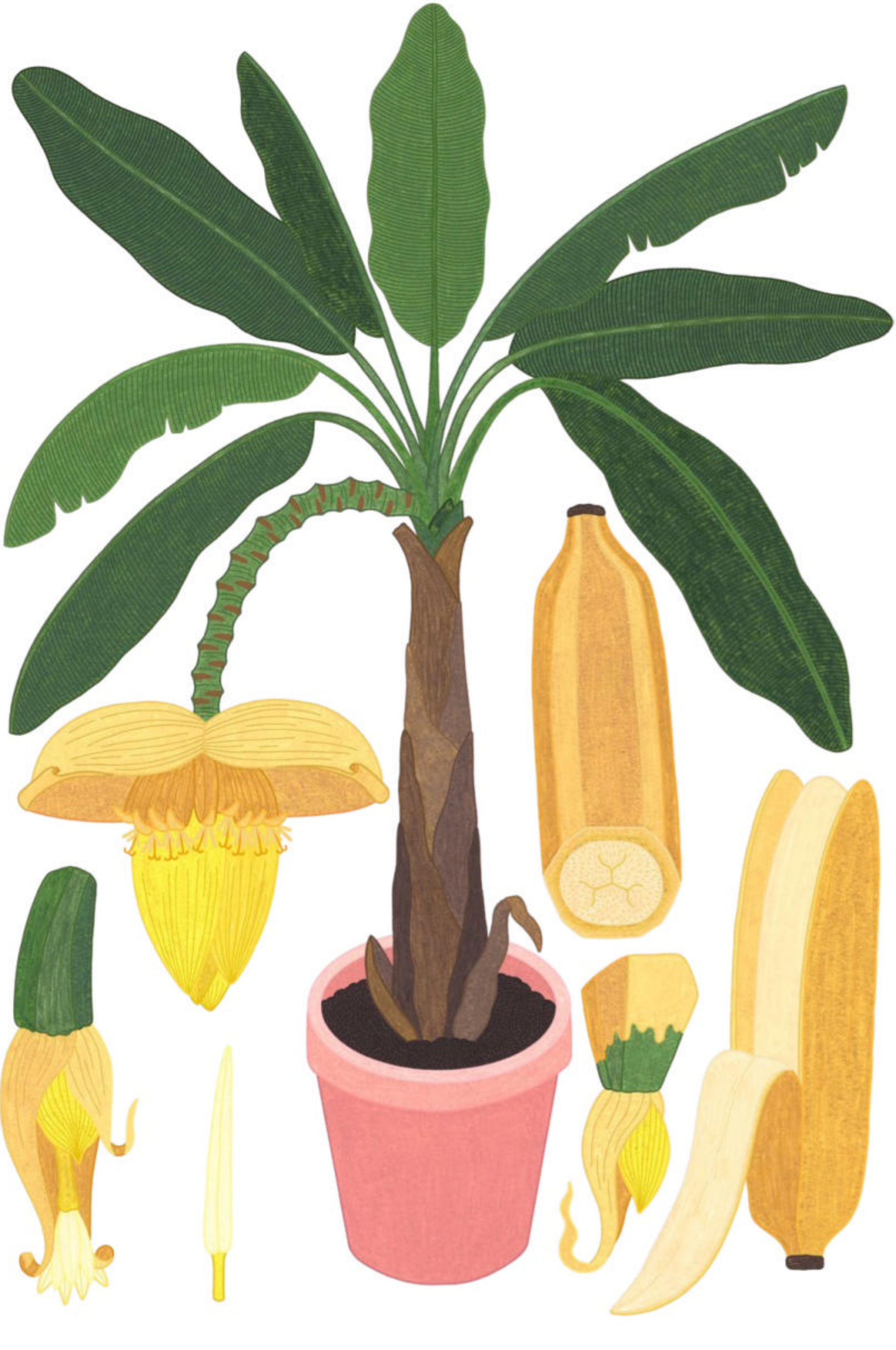
Sanguisorba hakusanensis / Korean burnet

I have a serious sanguisorba obsession. Growing the *Sanguisorba* genus is my life's joy. Regardless of varieties, I have always loved their unique characters and comparing their differences. It is too tough to choose one favourite! But I introduce *S. hakusanensis* as my favourite here, because this extraordinary species is one of the longest relationships I have had in the garden. In Japan, the common name is *karaitosou* – named after karaito, the silk thread introduced from China – for the plant's beautiful thread-like stamens. The Latin name means 'from the Haku mountain'. Its grey-green scalloped leaves thrive here and form a decorative pinnate clump. Before the flowering stems come up in spring, its huge clump looks like a big bird resting its wings. After the dramatic appearance at the beginning of the growing season, upright stems gradually start arching with masses of pink flowers, their stamens gracefully capturing the sunlight.

Type
Herbaceous perennial
Flowering
Summer, autumn
Height/spread
1.5m x 1.5m
Position
Full sun, part shade
Soil
Moist, well-drained
Hardiness
USDA 6b/7a / RHS H6

GROW One plant spreads over 1.2m in my garden. It has a tendency to droop, which is more noticeable in older plants. I recommend allowing them to follow their natural habit rather than trying to make them stand up with supports. Splitting a mature plant is quite a moment – you will be overwhelmed by the strength of its root system grabbing at the earth to live!





TAYSHAN HAYDEN-SMITH
Landscape designer, London

Type
Perennial
Height/ spread
4m x 2.5m
Position
Full sun
Soil
Well-drained
Hardiness
USDA 10b / RHS H2

Musa / Banana

At a primary school fair in Notting Hill, I was given £5 to spend on anything I wanted. While other children went home with sweets and toys, I came home with a small banana tree. I always used to have a banana with my Weetabix cereal in the morning and in my 10-year-old mind, I thought this might be the beginnings of my London banana farm. Of course, the banana tree has never borne any edible fruit, but still stands strong in my mum's garden in west London. It is a tree that not only reminds me of my childhood and a moment I cherish with my mum, but also of my Caribbean roots.

GROW My plant has been through it all. It has always been outside and never been brought indoors, yet it still stands and is going strong. I wouldn't advise everyone to leave bananas without protection in winter, though. Fortunately, our small garden is extremely enclosed and we live in a built-up area. I believe the surrounding conditions have allowed this tree to thrive.

The *What Gardeners Grow* book features contributions by...

Piet Oudolf, Joy Larkcom, Sarah Raven, Charles Dowding, Dan Pearson, Jekka McVicar, Matt Collins, Ron Finley, Claire Austin, Marylyn Abbott, Fergus Garrett, Edwina von Gal, Jean-Marie Avisard, Andy Sturgeon, Ulf Nordfjell, Jane Scotter, Tom Coward, Arabella Lennox-Boyd, Erin Benzakein, Arne Maynard, Rosy Hardy, Mark Diacono, Errol Fernandes, Juliet Sargeant, Adolfo Harrison, The Land Gardeners, Noël Kingsbury, Ann-Marie Powell, Kate Bradbury, Jacqueline van der Kloet, Claire Ratinon, Bleddyn and Sue Wynn-Jones, Isabel and Julian Bannerman, Tom Massey, Åsa Gregers-Warg, Michael Marriott, Katie Rushworth, Frances Tophill, Kim Wilkie, Mags Coughlan, Dave Goulson, Jim Gardiner and many, many more

THE RISE OF A ROMAN GARDEN

A new destination in Somerset pays horticultural homage to an ancient civilisation

Country house hotels are by their very nature dependent on the landscape around them, but the Newt in Somerset doesn't simply rely on its pastoral setting. Since opening in 2019, its 30-acre garden (an RHS Partner Garden), ash tree aerial walkway, apple tree maze, garden museum, woodland and lakeside apiary have attracted tens of thousands of visitors. The latest manifestation of its horticultural interest is the garden of Villa Ventorum (villa of the winds) – the Newt's impressive reconstruction of a third-century AD Roman dwelling based on the footprint of a historic settlement whose ruins lie close by. It was imagined by Lulu Urquhart and her design partner Adam Hunt, winners of best in show at 2022's Chelsea Flower Show following their wonderfully shaggy 'A Rewilding Britain Landscape' design. Their creation hoves into view as Lulu and I approach the far reaches of the estate along a pine-lined avenue: a beautiful garden planted only with species that would have been grown during the Roman period.

The Urquhart & Hunt studio is concerned with creating and restoring sustainable, ecological gardens, so this commission certainly suits their interest in native and naturalised planting. Running along the east side of the villa, the garden has an informality that befits a working country plot intended to provide plants for medicinal, ritualistic and culinary purposes. Divided by stone paths, the various beds billow over with plants that remain tall and sturdy despite the exposed site.

'We wanted everything to feel rustic rather than glamorous, but also contained within the more formal structures of the walls and paths,' says Lulu. 'There was a lot of deep-diving research. We looked at other Roman gardens in Italy and even at the seeds and tree resins that have been discovered in archeology.' Maggie Campbell-Culver, author of the *Origin of Plants*, was also involved. 'Maggie made sure that everything was accurate to the time,' says Lulu. 'She has been wonderful to work with as, like us, she was very keen for the garden to be authentic in look and feel.'

Surveying the wide diversity of plants around us, it's enlightening to learn how many have stood the test of time. Edged by a low hedge of myrtle (associated with goddess of love Aphrodite), there's an area for medicinal plants including marshmallow (for coughs), tarragon (fatigue), borage (inflammation), chamomile (headaches) and chicory (digestion). Lulu has even considered all the miles the Romans would have walked in sandals – 'their poor feet!' – and planted calendula and lavender for soothing balms.

Rosa gallica and *R. centifolia* are underplanted with violas to create a low hedge around the vegetable garden, where workaday turnips, parsnips, onions and beans grow alongside introductions such as cucumber, amaranth and pumpkin.

***Words** Caroline Donald*

Honouring the gods was as much part of Roman life as taking a hot bath, and the goddess Luna inspires planting chosen to represent the moon in silvery blues and golds, such as *Helichrysum italicum*, *Iris florentina* and white campanulas; we wander past Luna's painted statue, which stands draped in night-scented honeysuckles *Lonicera caprifolium* and *L. etrusca*. There's also a topiary garden with clipped bays for wisdom and luck, yews for purification and holly to celebrate Saturn. Two unclipped hawthorns edge some steps – not only were they mystical plants for the Romans, but were used in earlier pagan festivals such as Beltane. Around the corner there is a raised bed full of acanthus – surely one of Rome's most famous plants, seen carved into the tops of capitals and columns throughout the Empire.

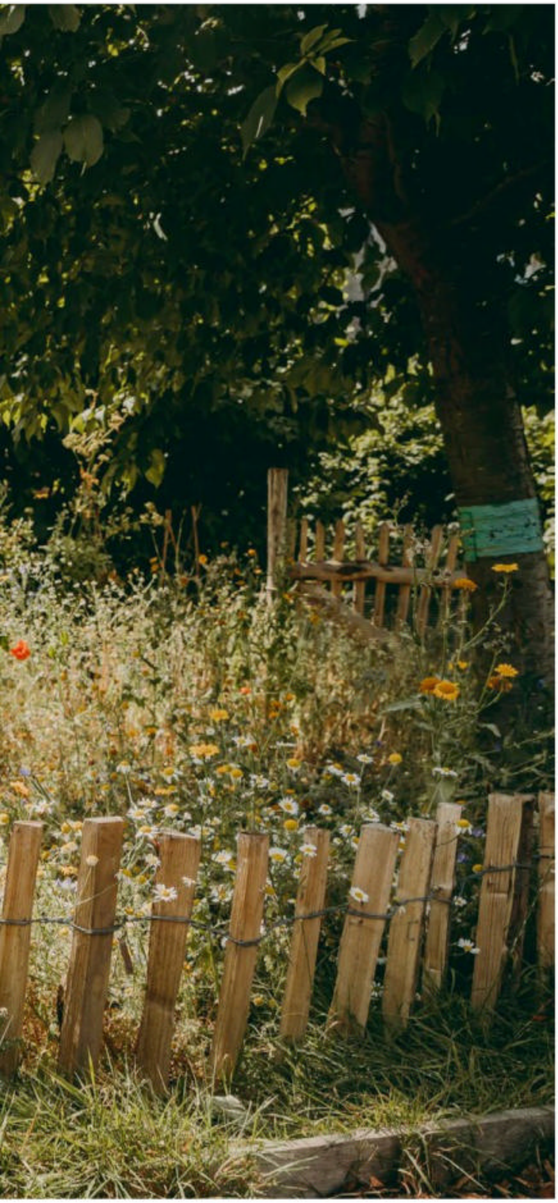
'Our real hope was that this garden wouldn't feel too designed,' explains Lulu. 'We wanted the plants to feel very meadowy, as though someone had a pocket full of seeds they had just chucked down.' This informality extends to her ideas for other parts of the garden, including a new vineyard. 'I'd love to see it underplanted with wildflowers,' she says, 'and for the approach to the garden to be via fields sown with cereal and poppies.' The Romans may have had sore feet, but they certainly had beautiful grounds to dander through.

PHOTOGRAPHY © Dave Watts

GROWING GREENER

With an appetite for plastic, peat and pesticides, garden centres and nurseries aren't always as environmentally conscious as we'd like. Bella Binns goes in search of the retailers leading the charge for change

Photography *Lily Bungay*



The nation's burgeoning enthusiasm for gardening has been well reported, but let's sum it up in one statistic: in 2020 alone, the number of UK gardeners grew by nearly three million, according to the Horticultural Trade Association (HTA). That's three million more people planting trees and plants, boosting biodiversity and having a positive impact on the wellness of themselves and others. It's also three million more people potentially visiting garden centres and nurseries.

Unfortunately, growing and selling plants can be a particularly resource-heavy pursuit. Energy, water, plastic, peat and chemicals may be used, while water pollution, poor waste management and polluting delivery practices exacerbate the impact on the environment.

In my search for destinations making an effort to do better, my first stop is my local Edible Culture in Kent where regimented rows of plants for sale meet a wild, ramshackle setting intended to support wildlife. 'When we started we were already largely a peat-free nursery and orchard, but we were becoming increasingly uncomfortable with the amount of plastic we were turning around,' says co-founder David Ware. No longer content with a plastic pot leaving the premises every time a plant was sold, David and his business partner Chris Williams decided to create their own alternative, the POSIpot.

'The idea came from my background in packaging,' says David. 'We recognised that we only use about three or four different pot sizes in the nursery, so we asked ourselves how a plant could be taken home but the plastic remain here. It was kind of a backwards thinking process.'

Made from biodegradeable cardboard that you can plant straight into the ground, POSIpots are now also being sold wholesale to other growers. David is keen to point out that plastic has its place in a nursery, but that it should be repositioned as a precious 'in-house tool' rather than a disposable by-product. 'It's about changing the way businesses handle plastics. It's about closing the loop,' he says. And it's not just their pots that reduce plastic waste. ➔

RUNNER BEAN 'ENORMA' £27 per kilo
SPINACH 'RENEGADE'
PEA 'ONWARD' £10 per kilo
PEA 'SHIRAZ' £28 per kilo
DWARF' £13 per kilo

Photographs taken at Edible Culture

Edible Culture also offers a plastic-free shop with scoop-your-own fertilisers, seeds and feeds sold by weight. 'We purchase everything in bulk and gear our shop and storage to accommodate that sort of volume. For instance, we don't buy little packets of mycorrhizal fungi to put on the shelf, we buy tons of it.' The scoop-your-own extends to a successful bag-for-life refill scheme with peat-free compost brand Melcourt, meaning no more black plastic bags for customers to dispose of.

They're ahead of the game when it comes to the use of peat, as the ban on the sale of bagged peat compost isn't due until 2024. There's currently no equivalent legislation for the sale or use of peat within horticultural businesses, though peat use by professionals is heading in the right direction – down from 0.72 million cubic metres in 2020 to 0.63 million cubic metres in 2021, the HTA tells me.

While some wholesale growers may struggle to wean themselves off peat entirely, many smaller, independent nurseries have already managed it. Claire Brodie was determined from the start to make a change in the industry when she set up her nursery, Little Green Plant Factory, in East Riding, Yorkshire. Propagating her perennials from British-grown plants, she's bypassing the need to import plants grown in peat or carrying pests and diseases. 'I chose to make a difference, even if it's a small one. My plants are grown in plastic that I reuse and are sent out to customers in biodegradable coir pots. There's no peat or chemicals and my polytunnels are now quite the ecosystem,' she says, 'home to loads of spiders, frogs, toads and grass snakes.'

It was a similar push for change that led Rosi Rollings to set up her pollinator-friendly nursery Rosybee in Monmouthshire. 'There's no good trying to help pollinators with plants but doing other damage simultaneously,' she says. 'Occasionally our organic plants might have mildew or a few bits of bug damage, but for the plant these are short-term cosmetic problems.'

Rosi is also certain her plants attract pollinators because she collaborated with ecologist and professor of biology Dave Goulson to publish a paper quantifying their attractiveness. But for the plants and pollinators to get the most from the exchange, there needs to be an absence of chemicals.

'Sadly, there's no way to know if the same species from garden centres and other chains carry pesticides,' Rollings says, citing a 2017 study (also by Dave Goulson), which highlighted the wide use of pesticides by major retail chains –

out of 29 'bee-friendly' plants tested, only two were found to be free of pesticides.

When it comes to growing plants for customers, it's not only the end product – the plants – that must be considered. Energy and fuel, staffing policies and even how waste is managed on site all need to be taken into account. As does the most heavily used and precious resource to growers: water.

When I visit Beth Chatto's famous gravel garden in Essex, the garden and nursery director David Ward explains how they're reducing their reliance on mains water. 'We channel the rain from the tunnels and outbuildings into an underground water chamber, which is then used to irrigate our nursery stock.' Together with the garden's dedication to drought-tolerant plants, they are leading the charge when it comes to water conservation and educating home growers.

> **I chose to make a difference, even if it's a small one**

It's also good to see some of the bigger chain nurseries taking up the baton. Hillier Garden Centres, for example, uses rainwater collected in its own reservoirs, with 85 percent of its 19 nurseries now water self-sufficient, while the UK's largest online retailer Crocus fuels its heated greenhouses with waste pallets. Retail behemoth Dobbies has overhauled its sustainability policies in recent years, with plastic pot recycling and its own peat-free compost. 'We were the first UK garden centre to launch compost packaging recycling bins,' says CEO Graeme Jenkins. The plastic is being turned into garden furniture by garden goods company Evergreen Garden Care and donated to children's charity Greenfingers. He joins many garden centre leaders in setting out aims to clean up their act – almost every retailer website I visited has a page dedicated to the sustainability policies they are implementing.

It's encouraging, but by no means is it time to get complacent. As customers, we need to challenge and question the claims and demand better and more every time we buy a plant. We need to consider the many processes involved in a plant's growing journey, rather than think merely of the price tag. If we put pressure on the garden centres and nurseries we use, it's possible we too can help speed the change. ⓑ

Hap cam

It's a (relatively) cheap holiday and it puts you at the heart of nature – we think 2023 is going to be an in-tents year. Here's our guide to perfect pitching, whether you're a newbie or a seasoned camper

Words *Euan Ferguson* | ***Illustration*** *Amelia Fowler*

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Last year saw something of a holiday boom as most international travel restrictions were lifted and people remembered what it felt like to stand in a passport queue and try to learn some words of a foreign language in one day. But it would be great if the lessons of those previous two years of staycations stayed with us – and reminded us that we don't need to jump on a plane to take a break from our daily lives.

So if you're planning a domestic holiday this year and want something a bit more adventurous than an Airbnb, camping could be the answer. Sleeping, eating and living outside is a way to find a deeper connection to nature than you'll get from just a day visit into the country. Before you get that festival tent out of the loft and stock up on tinned beans, though, remember that careful prep could mean the difference between a joyful alfresco time out and a cold, wet, hungry ordeal. Maybe you've never spent a single night under canopy, or maybe you've camped a bit but you're ready to take it wild – read on to find inspiration in our expert-packed guide to taking it outside. ➔

THE FIRST TIMER

The kit

If you're starting from scratch, it's easy to feel overwhelmed by the amount of kit you think you need. Camping is a budget-friendly break, but buying equipment might seem prohibitively expensive, especially if you're bringing a family, but there are a few budget hacks...

Check out tentshare.co.uk, which lets people rent out their camping equipment – a great alternative to buying. In summertime, sleeping bag liners (in place of pricey sleeping bags) will probably be enough to keep kids warm. And if weight isn't an issue, no need to buy specialist ultra-light kit – a small kitchen pan, for instance, will do just fine on a stove, and blankets and pillows from the beds are okay too.

However, don't forget about your environmental impact. 'Many people buy unfit-for-purpose equipment, thinking: We only need this for a week,' says Kevin Bird of Greener Camping (greenercamping.org), an organisation for sustainable camping that's a great resource for finding nature-first sites. 'Instead, buy quality kit even if it's secondhand. Better still find a location that can let you borrow or rent all the kit you need that would otherwise sit in the loft for the rest of the year. It will give you more room in the car, and it might mean you could go by public transport.'

And, whatever you do, don't forget a natural insect repellent – it could be the saviour of your trip. Citronella and eucalyptus is a top combo.

Outdoor cooking

'Start with something you are used to cooking at home,' says Harrison Ward, aka the Fell Foodie (@fellfoodie). He's something of a cordon-bleu campstove cook who creates impressive dishes on his hikes across the Lake District and will *not* let you settle for a Pot Noodle. 'Freshly cooked food outside heightens the connection with nature, but a bit more thought is required. Starting with a dish that is familiar, prepare and decant the ingredients into lightweight containers so you can bring it together using a stove and pan.' Try an easy one-pot pasta or rice dish with a minimal number of ingredients. And remember, it's worth it: 'Hot food tastes so much better in the outdoors'.

The locations

A site with running water, toilets or even showers will make your first forays into camping much more comfortable. If it's near public transport you'll feel less isolated, and if you are driving, some sites have a car park removed from the tent zone for a sense of seclusion. Greener Camping lists sites an hour's travel from cities, like the wildflower-filled Finchingfield in Essex or the hideaway Wild Cherry Camping in Denbighshire. The National Trust also has a network of sites across the UK – all have toilets and a rustic setting.

The wish-I'd-known-that tips

Go slow, keep it simple, go for just one night – see your first trip as an experiment. Even if it's hard work, you've learned how to do it better next time. 'Manage with fewer clothes, take a good book and remember to slow it down,' says Kevin. 'Life doesn't get better with speed, it just goes faster.'

Leave no trace

'Find a holiday host or location that cares not only about the environment but also community,' says Kevin. 'This is more likely to be smaller, often family-run accommodation providers. It's no accident that people who are passionate about the environment like to create intimate, friendly campsites.' ➔

• FAMILY CAMPING •

'If you're taking young children for their first camping trip, take a pillowcase or soft toy that has the familiar scent of home, they'll sleep easier. A little solar light popped into a white sock also makes a great camping night light. To keep them cosy, buy a reflective survival blanket (they cost about £1 online) and put it under your groundsheet, shiny side up.'

—

Cath Prisk, founder of Outdoor People, a social enterprise helping families to spend time in nature

THE NEED-A-REFRESHER

The kit

Spent a bit of time under canvas and want to take your tent beyond the confines of the all-amenities site? It's time to get semi-wild. Semi-wild sites are usually quite basic in terms of facilities and are often remote, but offer a far more back-to-nature experience. James Warner Smith is one of the UK's foremost experts on finding the perfect pitch and enjoying it too. 'Woodland campsites, in particular, are a great way to find wilder, car-free spaces,' he says. 'And on websites like hipcamp.com, use the filters to find campsites that allow fires and places where you're not allowed to park at your pitch – these are the most likely to be small and quiet.'

• WILD SWIMMING •

> **'There is no such thing as a safe swim spot, only a safe swimmer, so use the many online guides to swimming spots around the UK, but always assess the site for yourself. Wherever you swim, cover up any cuts before plunging in, don't swallow any water and wash your hands before eating.'**
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> —
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> Kate Rew, founder of The Outdoor Swimming Society

The locations

James's book *Almost Wild Camping* features naturalistic sites. 'Near London I like finding woodland campsites that feel very wild even if you're still in the busy southeast,' he says. 'Places like Badgells Wood in Kent and Beech Estate Woodland in Sussex stand out. But I also love campsites that aren't really campsites at all, just official areas where you can get permits to pitch a tent. For example, there are seven locks along the River Thames you can only reach by boat, bike, or on foot that the Environment Agency lets you camp at. And Forestry & Land Scotland have a number of informal "permit" campsites that you can hike or cycle to; often they have a toilet but little else.' Taking public transport reduces the number of cars in the countryside and encourages travelling light. 'Try to only pack what you could reasonably fit into a backpack,' says James. 'That way it's a bit closer to wild camping and it makes it easier to walk to the furthest possible pitch.'

• **FEELING CONFIDENT** •

> **'When you're Black, it's unfortunately normal to feel uncomfortable in the British outdoors. Search for people who understand you, share your passions and your woes and are committed to exploring green spaces. Be open to trying something new and frightening, and take each experience as a learning one. Lastly, have fun!'**
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> —
>
> Tianna Johnson, founder of Black Girls Camping Trip

The wish-I'd-known-that tips

James is full of them. 'A flint strike is a foolproof way of lighting a gas camping stove,' he says. 'It's cheap, it creates a spark in any weather, and never runs out. Lint from a tumble dryer makes the ultimate tinder for a campfire (store it somewhere dry). Pitch your tent so that the smallest end is facing towards the wind. And a campfire is always worth it. Always. It's great for morale. Also, don't feel guilty for being a fair-weather camper. There's no shame in wanting to avoid the rain, especially if you don't have an easy way to dry out your things before the following night.'

Outdoor cooking

'Cooking over fire is an experience that feels very primal, but extra care has to be taken,' says Harrison. 'It's not permissible in many national parks due to the risk of wildfire or leaving a trace on the landscape. If you are in a site that has an area for open fires, though, it can add another level to your dishes in regards to flavour and fun. Some classic one-pot dishes like Mexican chilli, gumbo or stew will be quite forgiving as you get used to controlling the heat of an open fire, while still giving you something delicious and rustic to enjoy.' ➔

THE SEASONED PRO

The kit

So you're ready to leave the civilised world behind and head out into the *proper* outdoors for a while. The more wild your site, the more your kit choice becomes about survival rather than comfort. Dan Jones (@wildcamping.lifeuk) has been wild camping for years and shares his stories and wisdom on social media. 'Making the transition from campsite/car camping to wild camping is pretty straightforward,' he says reassuringly. 'The gear you'll need will be a lot lighter than your general campsite/family car camping trips. The first items I would focus on would be a lightweight backpacking tent, a good-sized rucksack and a sleeping bag that will keep you warm. Then you're pretty much ready to hit the hills. The biggest tip I would offer is try not to overthink it. You will make mistakes. This is all part of the journey.'

Outdoor cooking

'So much can be produced on a simple camping stove – you may only have one direct heat source but this doesn't mean options should be limited,' says Harrison. His ambition when camping is inspiring. 'If you're looking to start light, perhaps a tasty risotto could be on the menu. One shallot, garlic, arborio rice, stock cube and some dried mushrooms won't take up a lot of rucksack room and will give you something warm and filling on a night under the stars. I have cooked all sorts out in the open, from curries to fondue, freshly baked breads to mac and cheese, steaks to pancakes. Your imagination is your limitation.'

The wish-I'd-known-that tips

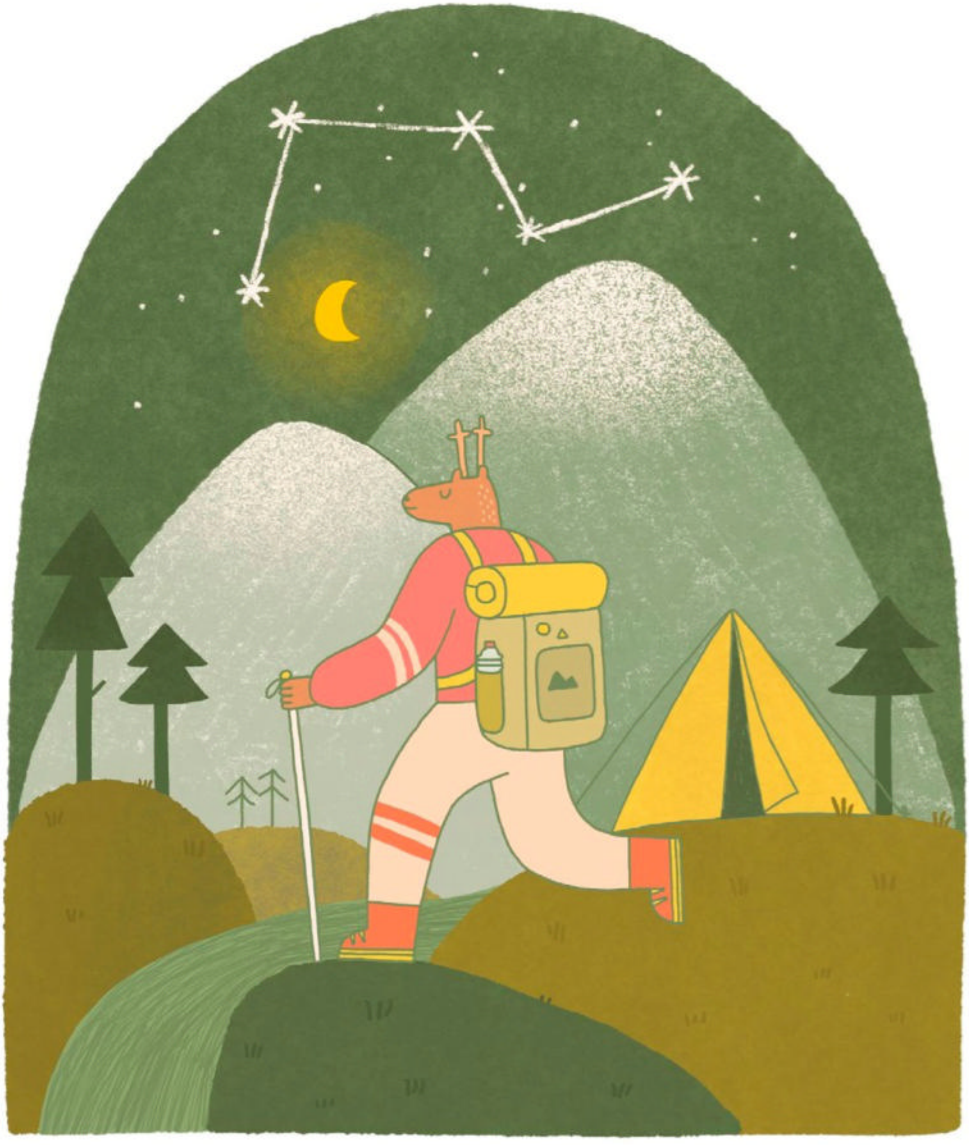
Even in built-up Britain, it's possible to find yourself a day's walk or so away from civilisation when wild camping, so start on familiar ground before launching yourself into the wilderness. A nearby forest or field is a good place to familiarise yourself with your equipment. 'Pitching your tent just before last light and packing up just before first light is a good rule of thumb to stick by,' says Dan. 'And pack a camp pillow. This totally transformed my experience. A good night's sleep on top of a mountain is priceless.'

The locations

Remember, true wild camping is illegal in England and Wales without permission of the landowner – even in Dartmoor, which lost its rights earlier this year. It is legal in most parts of Scotland. But heading into the hills, or finding a deserted cove, or hunkering down in a sheltered corner of a wild moor and waking up surrounded by the most untamed nature Britain has to offer is the joy of wild camping, and it's still possible with some preparation. 'Keep it low key,' says Dan. 'I use the OS Maps app to plot routes and plan my trips. It's a fantastic tool. Pitching your tent on a flat surface will obviously offer a more comfortable night, so researching the area is important. And check for any natural wind protection, such as a rocky outcrop.'

Leave no trace

'Leave no trace' means exactly that – don't dig any holes or trenches, don't move rocks or vegetation, stay away from animals both wild and farmed. We can't encourage building fires outside of sites, but if you do, burn only wood gathered from the ground or paper. b



• HIKING •

'Planning is key before you set off – even the most experienced hiker can get into difficulty. Basic skills (such as map reading) and the right equipment (clothes for all weathers, plus snacks and water) can save you from serious accidents.'

—

Rhiane Fatinikun, founder of Black Girls Hike

SALVAGE GARDEN

An enchanting celebration of imagination, scrap materials and a refusal to waste a thing, Chauffeur's Flat in Surrey is a garden like no other. Max Crisfield takes an adventure in wonderland

Photography *Lily Bungay*

Recycling and repurposing are tropes of our modern age; they feel very twenty-first century. But for John and Carole Richins they are nothing new. This octogenarian couple have been quietly embracing a make-do-and-mend attitude all their lives. And their garden, an extraordinary fantasia of creative horticulture, found objects and upcycled art, is a glorious testament to that.

There is something rather theatrical about the approach to their home, Chauffeur's Flat, in the sleepy village of Tandridge in Surrey. Driving beneath the arch of a domed clocktower into their circular courtyard is like alighting at a railway terminus from some E Nesbit novel. The area is divided into large, curvilinear flats, complete with arched windows, wrought-iron canopies and slate roofs. This striking piece of architecture, John tells me, was the former motor house for Tandridge Court, the large manor house that sits across the way.

John and Carole bought the property in 1977. They had originally met at Camberwell School of Art in the 1950s and were confirmed Londoners. Then, partly because they had three young children, but primarily because they wanted a garden, they began to dream of a life beyond the city. Nearly half a century

later, they are still there and their garden is open to the public through the National Garden Scheme a few days each year.

In contrast to the grand courtyard entrance, access to the one-and-a-half-acre garden is modest: a discreet passageway that cuts through to the back of the building. Steps dotted with Mexican fleabane lead down from French windows to the lower garden, a series of circular lawns, narrow paths and cobbled alcoves. And that's where the fairy tale-like landscape really begins.

One of the first things John shows me is a beautiful cast-iron stool, its seat the coal-hole cover from his former Balham home. Then there's the huge marble tabletop, all glimmering white, set above a long, iron bench. The marble, John tells me, was formerly a fishmongers' counter, and the bench was the grating that covered the hot water pipes from the flat's original boiler. I notice a semicircle of textured cobbles. These, John explains, were created from excess cement set in moulds made of plastic food containers. As we meander, I discover similar constructions. A rusty iron mangle makes a tiered shelf for plant pots. A ribbon of upturned wine bottles forms a faux rill.

Then there's the art. Among the trees and shrubs and herbaceous planting is a gallery of the uncanny. At first you don't notice it all; you have to get your eye in. Then you see it everywhere, in every nook and cranny, a sculptural creation dreamed up by Carole and brought to life by John. (The two artists have his and hers studios beneath their flat.) There's a tabletop mosaic complete with embedded cutlery. An old shovel spilling forth its contents of bolts and chains and nuts and screws. A steampunk dragonfly made from the steps of a staircase. An iron scarecrow fashioned from old bed springs, an electric fan, a pickaxe blade and two car horns. One of the more extraordinary pieces is an iron hay cart transformed into a canopied bed chamber. 'We call it our trolley folly, or folly trolley, I can't remember which,' John says. This stands at the edge of the original garden boundary.

> *A rusty iron mangle makes a tiered shelf for plant pots. A ribbon of upturned wine bottles forms a faux rill*

In 2016 John and Carole acquired the fields immediately beyond. Through this former grazing land John has mown a pattern of paths, leaving islands of long grass and wildflower meadow.

The planting in the garden itself is both pragmatic and aesthetic. There are lots of strategically placed trees and shrubs – birch, hawthorn and snake-bark maple; weeping pear and coppiced paulownia; contorted hazel and *Buddleja globosa* – many crown-lifted and carefully pruned to create views and framing devices for the artworks. This strong structure is then softened by romantic, wilder planting. Rambling roses and clematis scramble through the canopies, while specimen tree peonies, shrub roses and trailing wisteria (no less than nine varieties) are underplanted with a carpet of hardy geraniums, euphorbias and *Phlomis russeliana*.

The lower part of the garden was designed by Carole and created from scratch. She did much of this work herself, as John was busy 'earning a crust' as an art teacher in a secondary school. The upper sections, which climb and wind through steep woodland until you are poised above the buildings below, has by contrast been a process of evolution. 'It was all laurel and rhododendron,' says Carole, 'so I cut through with a machete to see what was there. It was like a scene from *Sleeping Beauty*!' Up here, with views out across the valley, is one the couple's most ambitious and most romantic structures: a spiral staircase that clings to the trunk of a large conifer. At the top rung you reach a wrought-iron walkway leading to a perfectly placed bucket seat, an arboreal sanctuary for one.

I'm intrigued to discover where Carole and John get their materials. 'From anywhere and everywhere,' they tell me. The discarded copper from a clock tower restoration. The lead from their neighbours' roof repairs. All manner of flotsam and jetsam cast out by friends and relatives. All of it rescued and reimagined as something useful or beautiful.

I'm also fascinated to learn how they adopted their homespun aesthetic in the first place. 'We like to use things that people throw away, it's as simple as that,' says John. 'I think this is partly because we were both born during the war, and you used what you'd got.'

'My dad used to straighten his old bent nails,' remembers Carole. 'My mother taught us to knit and crochet. We use that same crafting attitude in the garden too, dividing plants, taking cuttings and layering. It's all about making something out of nothing.'

But there is more to it than just being thrifty; John and Carole are simply not that prosaic. First and foremost, they are artists, and they see their garden as an extension of their own creativity. 'The garden *is* our artwork,' says John, 'and whatever we acquire, whatever someone else discards, we make into art.'

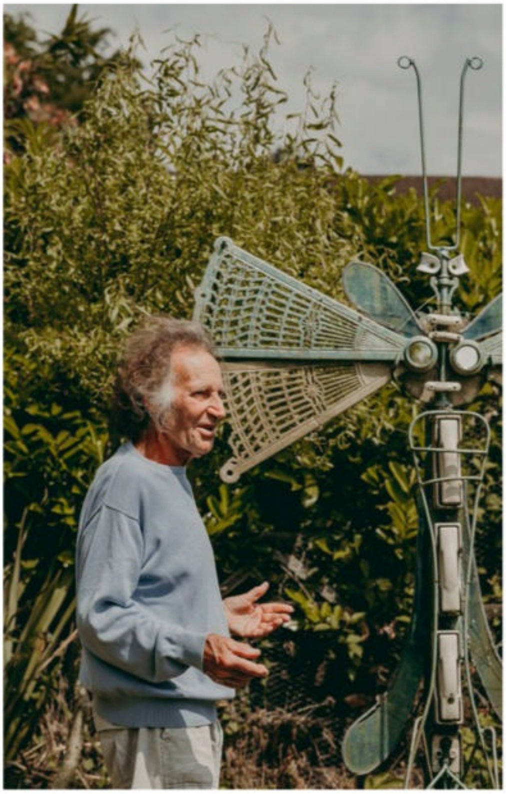
As we sit in the shade, overlooking the garden below, I reflect on the fact that they maintain all of this on their own, with no outside help. It seems staggering to me so I pose what I fear might be a delicate question: how are they going to manage as they get older?

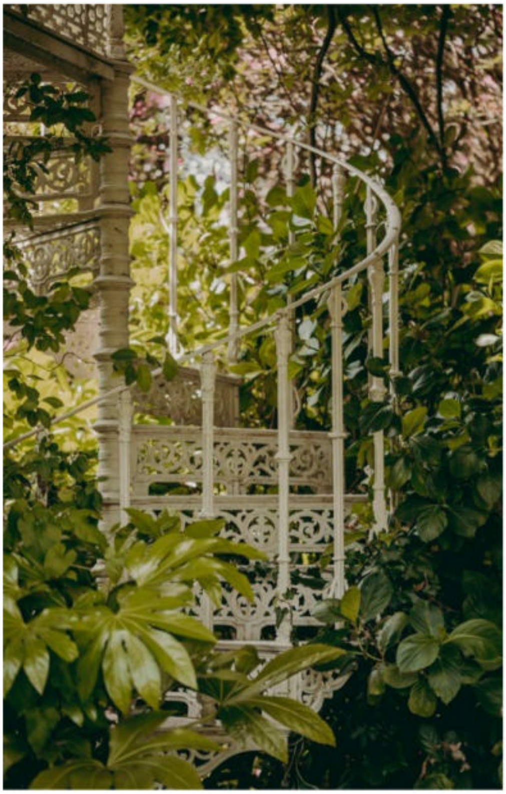
They're remarkably sanguine: 'I'm going to end up on the compost heap!' says Carole. 'Eventually, it will all just envelop us, and then return to how it was before.'

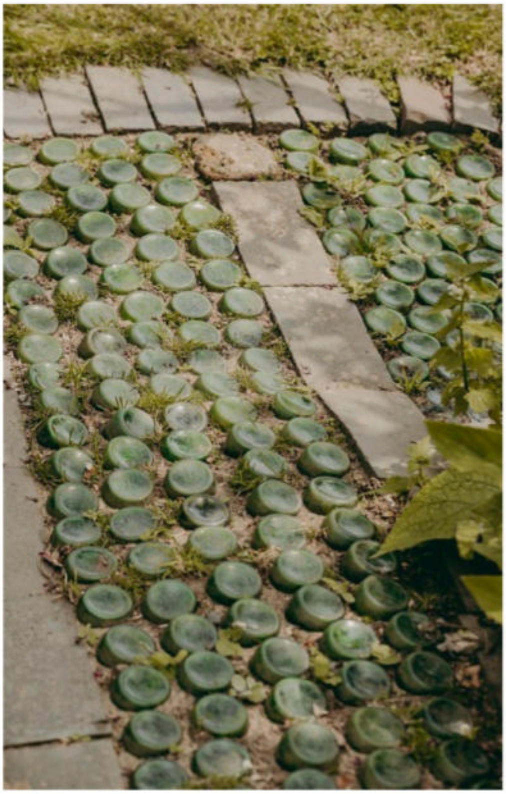
'It's already happening,' adds John, 'there are some things you look out over now and you can't see them because things have grown around them.' Does that matter, I ask? 'Yes and no,' says John, thoughtfully. 'It depends, because we do it for ourselves, we don't really do it for other people. And you've got to remember, it doesn't feel like work, it isn't work, it's a way of life for us.'

And what a life! As we begin to emerge from decades of unrestrained consumerism and throwaway culture, as we finally begin to pay attention to the waste that follows in our wake and take seriously our responsibilities to salvage and reuse, this formidable couple and their remarkable garden should be an inspiration to us all. ⓑ

We like to use things that people throw away, it's as simple as that







Fantastical botanical

Since time immemorial, fictitious plants have reflected our relationship with nature. Poet Molly Underwood discovers what happens when our imaginations truly run wild

The botanical offerings of planet Earth are by far stranger than fiction, but humans are unable to resist throwing our horticultural hat into the ring and dreaming up our own. Talking trees, fantastical fruit, evil vines with a taste for flesh – all are botanical inventions to rival nature's strangest. And as our relationship to our natural environment has shifted through the ages, so too has the tone and tenor of the story we tell.

Once upon a time (the story goes), the world was as young and as warm as a soft-boiled egg. There were ocean-sized forests. There were far-off lands and travellers that returned to tell tales of them. It was not unreasonable to think that in one of those lands, there might be – must be – a flower that opened to reveal not a cluster of seeds but a small, perfectly formed sheep, perched on an umbilical stem, swaying in the wind. This particular wonder, the Vegetable Lamb of Tartary, held half of northern Europe's imagination in the palm of its miniature hoof for many decades following its first recorded mention in the creative memoirs of a fourteenth-century monk.

It is a legend rivalled perhaps only by the eleventh-century Barnacle Tree, which boasted an unusual bounty come harvest season: dozens of fully grown geese. Eight hundred years later, bird migration research would finally solve the mystery of where

***Illustration** Amyisla McCombie*

barnacle geese are born (in Greenland, it turns out; not in a magical shrub), in a major blow to the credibility of the original explanation.

But these fictional marvels of nature, silly as they sound now, were the bread and butter of early botanical invention: miraculous tales with explanatory power in the face of a world that sometimes made no sense. They comprised a kind of key – literally, in the case of raskovnik, a mythical herb from Slavic folklore, once said to open any lock – and collectively they tell a story of nature as perhaps we once knew it: benevolent, life-giving, alive in strange and wonderful ways.

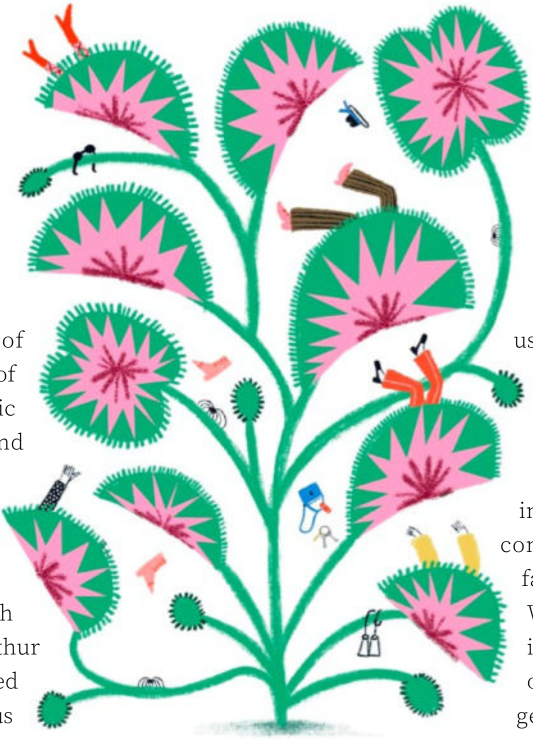
All good stories come to an end. As the Industrial Revolution picked up pace, and the Age of Enlightenment stretched its tendrils across Europe, the Western world's relationship to nature began to change – perhaps irreparably. Nature, now, was something to be categorised, catalogued. Conquered. All that was wild was to be tamed: chopped up and popped in a specimen jar with a Latin label. Somewhere beneath this newfound scientific rigour, and a sinister obsession with classification, lurked the beginnings of a horror story. The plucky protagonists: the Victorians. The antagonist: the natural world itself.

> **Fictional marvels tell a story of nature as we once knew it: benevolent, life-giving, alive in strange and wonderful ways**

Amid such efforts to impose order on nature, there arose a literary backlash of sorts. Poets like Edward Lear satirised the worst excesses of plant taxonomy in his wonderful *Nonsense Botany*, an illustrated pastiche of a Victorian botanical journal. Horticultural highlights include the brilliantly silly Jinglia Tinkettlia (a bluebell-esque flower with teapots for petals) and the Armchairia Comfortabilis (which surely needs no explanation at all). And my personal favourite: the Tigerlillia Terribilis, an invention straight out of a mediaeval monk's diary, with petals that open to reveal a cluster of tiny tigers within.

Nonsense Botany is an utterly charming ode to the wondrous weirdness of the world's flora and fauna: a kind of 'celebratory cabaret', as nature writer Richard Mabey puts it. But there is perhaps something slightly wistful in the illustrations, too. They represent an innocent whimsy – a playfulness, even – that belonged to an earlier time.

Elsewhere, the story was taking a more menacing turn. As they were conquering nature at home, so too had the Victorians set out to colonise land abroad, where they were confronted with terrain that seemed to them both hostile and exotic. (In reality, wrote the Lakota chief Standing Bear at the time, the land was no such thing. 'To us it was tame.')



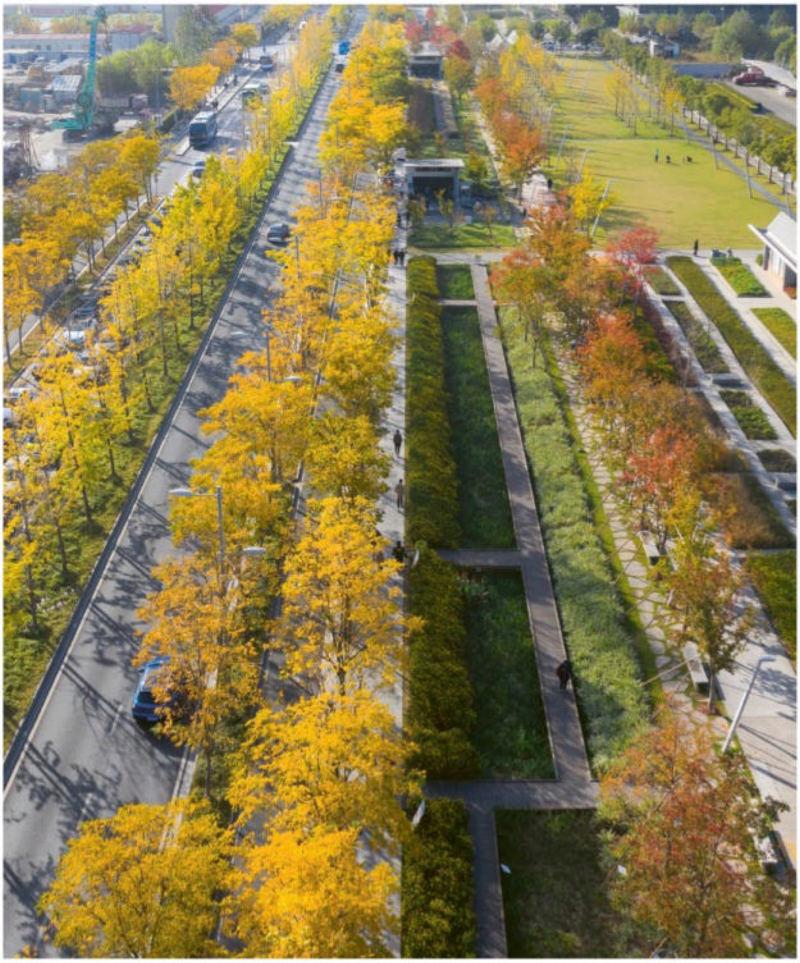
In the cruelties of empire lay the seeds of a new botanical gothic genre. Periodicals and penny magazines were filled with theatrical tales of tropical man-eating plants and hothouse flowers with murderous intent. Arthur Conan Doyle imagined giant, carnivorous Venus flytraps, tall as a man; HG Wells conjured up tentacled orchids leeching the life from their victims. Lucy Cooper even invented a kind of vegetable Frankenstein in the form of Carnivorine, a hapless scientist's accidental arboreal creation. It was thus that fairy tale became horror story. These plants were the stuff of nightmares: dangerous, deviant and straight from the psyche of a society haunted by the fear that empire might 'bite back'.

In the last century, the literary obsession with Venus flytraps has receded slightly (for which we must all be grateful); but the fear of nature, it seems, has remained. From John Wyndham's famous seven-foot triffids to the plant-evolved predators of *Hothouse* by Brian Aldiss, and the virulent space-algae infecting the sun in *Project Hail Mary* by Andy Weir, modern literature has showcased a new type of fantasy botany. Spine-chillingly sentient, often hostile and usually heralding some kind of imminent apocalypse. Whatever could be fuelling an anxiety like that?

Science-fiction lovers in search of contemporary contributions to botanical fantasy might enjoy Chuck Wendig's *Heartland Trilogy*, in which an invasive species of (possibly carnivorous) genetically modified corn has taken over great swathes of the American Midwest. Or there's NK Jemisin's dazzling *Inheritance Trilogy*, where a recently grown 'world tree' casts its shadow over a great city, shrouding the poorest neighbourhoods in darkness. Both engage thoughtfully with our contemporary story: the story of environmental crisis, how we got here and where we might go next.

Will Western literature ever return to the whimsical charm of lambs that grow on stalks? Perhaps not – the world has changed irretrievably since, and so has our place in it. But pockets of wonder can always be found in the haven of children's literature: the magic lives on in Roald Dahl's snozzcumbers, or the leaping toadstools of Hogwarts, or the endlessly imaginative worlds of Dr Seuss. Through them, new generations can learn that nature is something to be enjoyed and wondered at. If anyone needs me, I'll be up a Truffula Tree.

On the future of city parks



Courtesy of Sasaki

Parks are the green lungs of urban centres the world over, but as our needs – and our climate – rapidly change, can these public spaces keep pace?

Words *Chris Beanland*

A retreat from urban chaos. A lunch-break canteen. An open-air gym, open-air yoga studio, open-air pub. A haven for contemplation or a traffic-free shortcut. Somewhere to walk the dog or somewhere to walk yourself, with benches and lawns for meeting friends or for quiet contemplation. A place for strollers, sitters, rough sleepers, drug dealers, joggers, drinkers and thinkers. City parks mean many things to many people, but these days they're in transition, mirroring the shift in society: from formal to familiar, from reckless-with-resources to climate considerate. I've spent hours in parks all over the world while researching my book, *City Parks*, and I've seen the changes they're undergoing.

One thing I've noticed time and again can be summarised thus: wibbly-wobbly stuff. The exacting rosebeds, flower clocks and perpendicular paths of Britain's Victorian city parks have been cancelled. Today's landscape architects love curved walkways, wild and seemingly unpredictable planting, and organic sculptural structures. Today's parks represent our more permissive present just as their more staid ancestors spoke of a generation where discrete promenading and good behaviour were the *sine qua non* of the public sphere.

People have a million more things to do than they did back when the parks arrived en masse in Britain's urban centres in the 1800s, and the parks of the future need to keep attracting them. The history of the park is older than that, though. Paris's Jardin des Tuileries dates from the 1500s, while Boston Common in Massachusetts and London's Hyde Park go back to the 1600s. Some of the first proper public parks were developed from scratch in England following the Industrial Revolution, such as Liverpool's Princes Park in 1842 and Birkenhead Park in 1847. Unplanned and rapid mass migration to cities created dense and insalubrious living conditions; parks gave the people air and space and the opportunity to play.

As a nation, we do still love a park, and city folk know they need the air and space just as much as their predecessors did. But I think the future park will need to offer even more opportunities to play. The wonky paths and sculptural elements in new parks are partly for the pleasure of kids – the park's biggest customer. But they speak to the fact that the adult world is unravelling and we're staring armageddon in the face. There have long been mazes, carriage drives and adventure playgrounds in parks, but more recently play – the adult sort – has been a real priority. There's an open-air climbing wall at London's Olympic Park, a treetop walkway above Xiangmi Park in Shenzhen, China, and interactive fountains in Klyde Warren Park in Dallas, US, while parks with large areas of grass, such as Hyde Park, are now co-opted for huge commercial music festivals.

The park of the future is also about acknowledging climate change. The less formal natural world you see in parks

> **As a nation, we do still love a park, and city folk know they need the air and space just as much as their predecessors did**

these days is part of that, and likely means we'll see even more 'authentic' environments rather than those more obviously sculpted by humans: long grass, wildlife-friendly planting, things left a bit more like nature would have them. The plants and infrastructure are also becoming more resilient: drought-tolerant plants, trees that filter pollution, reservoirs to collect water.

Asia has grasped this future ahead of most: Xuhui Runway Park in Shanghai was designed on the 'sponge city' principle by architects Sasaki and opened during the pandemic – the time, incidentally, when we remembered how much we needed the local park. Wetland plants and permeable ground are designed to collect rainwater rather than allowing it to run off the hard paths and concrete that appears in so many parks. Sustainable bamboo lumber abounds and the planting is completely native.

Xuhui made use of a former industrial zone and airport and is a great example of repurposing rather than demolishing (a topic which is even more important now we see the wastefulness and environmental impact of knocking things down). And there are other examples, from Seoullo 7017 in South Korea (built as a highway in 1970 and turned into a sky-garden park in 2017) to the huge new Ellinikon Metropolitan Park development in Athens (also by Sasaki) that completely transforms a disused post-industrial area. What none of these parks has is a traditional lawn. Those pointless grassy rectangles are good for footy and frisbee but useless for much else – they could be turned into useful public spaces that benefit all species.

While the new high-spec, architect-led parks are impressive and important, the more humble and nurturing sights you see in parks old and new are on the rise too. The wild garlic growing in the gardens at Highbury Fields in London and left out in a lunch box for people to take. Or, three streets away, the Olden Community Garden, where volunteers dart about growing and heaving and carrying in a bid to make a pleasing green space for locals. Community allotments, gardening clubs, forest schools and more will all be utilising these spaces.

So the future of the park is safe. They will always be with us in some form, because the natural world was our first home – we want to go back, that's why we love plants and open spaces so much. They are the most perfect places to revel in humanity's contradictions.

Chris Beanland is the author of books including *City Parks* (Batsford), out in April; he hosts comedy podcast Park Date. @parkdatepodcast | parkdate.co.uk

LIVING THINGS

BOTANICAL
IDEAS
WITH STYLE ➔

WHO RUN

In her new book *Bitch*, zoologist Lucy Cooke turns sexist stereotypes of female animals on their head. Here she introduces some of nature's most mould-breaking matriarchs

Illustration *Jen Collins*

What does it mean to be a good mother – passive, peaceful, caring and coy? These stereotypes date back to Charles Darwin, who branded 'the female of the species' in the shape of a Victorian housewife. But look afresh and you'll see many feisty females who break that mould and force us to redefine what femininity really means. Here are some of the most surprising examples I found in my research.

I once stole a lion's girlfriend. I was in the Maasai Mara in Kenya experimenting with audio playback. This involved blasting the recording of a roar into another lion's territory and waiting for a response: an audacious line of scientific enquiry that resulted in three lions – one female and two males – racing over to investigate. The males left once they failed to find anything resembling a rival. The female, however, pinned us to the spot, legs akimbo, for over two hours. She was in estrus and, in addition to mating with her consorts, she wanted to mate with the owner of my tinny roar. I was shocked to discover that when fertile, females are known to mate one hundred times with multiple males in a matter of days. This flagrant promiscuity is now

THE WORLD?

understood to be in the name of being a good mother. It's a way of confusing paternity and protecting her offspring against the threat of infanticide by incoming males.

For the meerkat, being a good mother means being viciously competitive. A recent scientific study of more than 1,000 mammals unmasked the meerkat as the most homicidal, beating even humans. One in five meerkats will be violently killed by another meerkat – most likely their own mother. Meerkats live in family clans dominated by a matriarch with a zero-tolerance policy for breeding subordinates. Any females that dare to give birth will be evicted – the equivalent of a death sentence in the Kalahari – and have their babies killed. They're allowed to return as long as they wet nurse their murderous matriarch's babies instead. This enables the matriarch to concentrate all her energy on further pregnancies and not waste any on the energetically draining act of feeding and caring for her own young.

For the Laysan albatross, being a mother means being flexible about the sex of your partner. I visited the colony at Keanna Point in Hawaii, where a third of the albatross couples are female-female. There is a shortage of males at this new colony and these pioneering females have adapted by soliciting another albatross's husband as sperm donor, then partnering with a female to raise the chick. Being a single parent is not an option, as albatross chicks are uniquely slow maturing and take almost six months to become airborne themselves. Some of these females will eventually switch to an available male. Some remain in same-sex relationships for life. I met one couple that have been together for 17 years, raised eight chicks and are grandparents to three more. These birds indulge in all the same lovey-dovey preening that heterosexual albatross couples engage in. Their innovative partnership demonstrates the flexibility of sexuality, sex roles – and mothers – in nature.

Lucy is the author of *Bitch: The Female of the Species* (Penguin)

> ‘To mark summer solstice we like to go up Rodborough Common for views over Stroud valley and to enjoy some of our favourite little rituals, like eating crisps and dancing as the sun goes down’

Sticks and handkerchiefs may be involved, but these are no ordinary Morris dancers. Boss Morris – an all-female group from Gloucestershire – are the kind of folk troupe that dances alongside indie band Wet Leg at the Brit awards, sets its choreography to electro and makes some striking sartorial and make-up choices.

‘Our inspiration is rooted in traditional dances and movements, though we tend to tease influences from all kinds of modern formation dance,’ says Rhia Davenport, one of the 12-strong crew. ‘We add our own flourishes to make them feel more “boss”.’

Boss Morris keep to tradition as they look to inspire a connection to their local Cotswolds countryside, but their modern, prog sensibility means ditching the nationalism often associated with Morris dancing and replacing it with inclusivity and a playful sense of mischief that brings this ancient dance into the twenty-first century.

‘We never set out to change the future of Morris dancing,’ says Rhia, ‘but we’re happy our efforts, alongside others on the scene, are bringing this dance to new audiences.’

Photography *Aloha Bonser-Shaw*

Boss Morris perform at festivals and events throughout the year. @boss.morris | bossmorris.com

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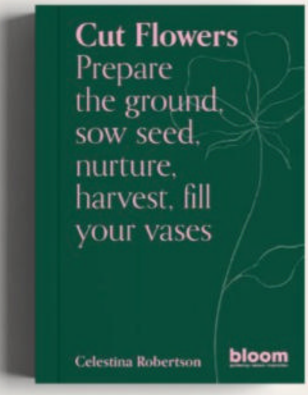
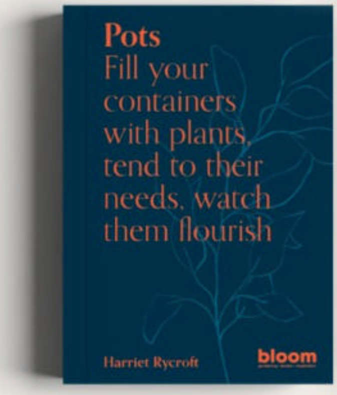
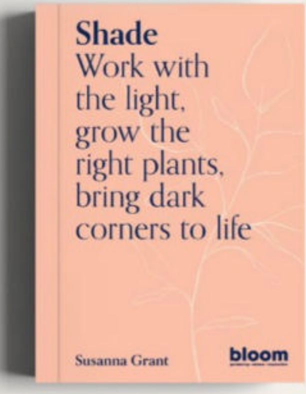


Cut Flowers
Prepare the ground, sow seed, nurture, harvest, fill your vases
Celestina Robertson
bloom



Pots
Fill your containers with plants, tend to their needs, watch them flourish
Harriet Rycroft
bloom



Shade
Work with the light, grow the right plants, bring dark corners to life
Susanna Grant
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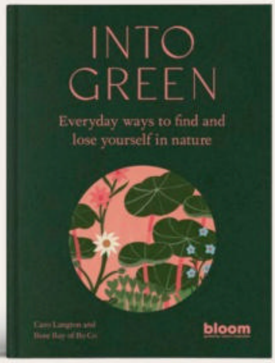
Bloom books are available in all good book shops and from bloommag.co.uk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Everyday ways to find and lose yourself in nature
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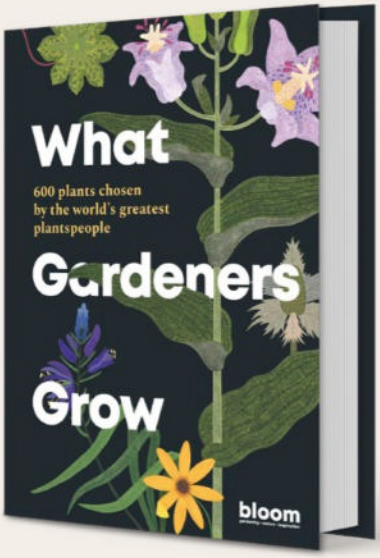
Into Green

Everyday ways to find and lose yourself in nature

‘An inspiring and practical guide to fostering connectedness’
SUE STUART-SMITH


What
600 plants chosen by the world's greatest plantspeople
Gardeners
Grow
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What Gardeners Grow

600 plants chosen by the world’s greatest plantspeople

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The Sunday Times

Benjamin Pope
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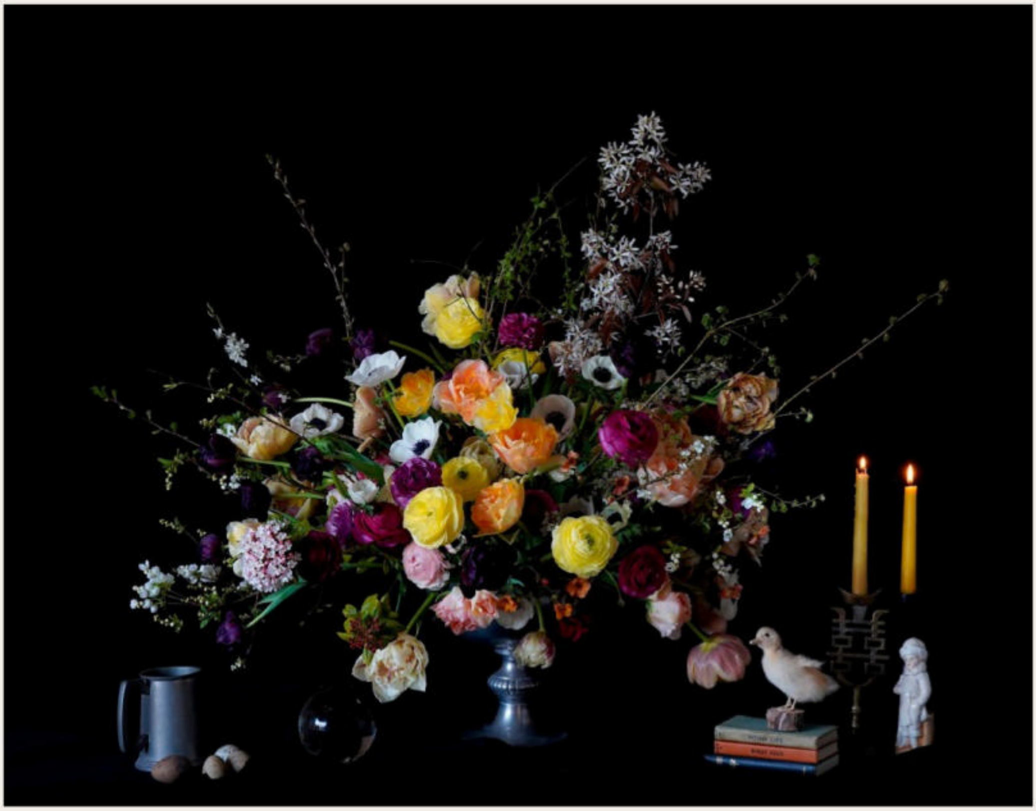
LET'S GO DUTCH

Photography Piers Bizony



Grower and florist Fiona Haser Bizony, founder of Electric Daisy Flower Farm in Somerset, guides us through creating a living floral arrangement in the style of a Dutch-master still life painting

You will need

- Stems of small-flowering shrubs such as *Amelanchier lamarckii*, viburnum and *Lonicera fragrantissima*
- Flowering shrubs from the hedgerow such as hawthorn
- Flowers. Here I've used three types of ranunculus, three types of tulip, anemones and *Geum* 'Totally Tangerine'
- A vase. Here I've used a metal-footed ice bowl. Anything raised is good, as it allows the flowers to tumble forward and gives the design depth
- Flower pins or frogs for the bottom of the container, plus a chicken-wire pillow to help keep the flowers in position
- Fabric. I've used black velvet as a backdrop, but any dark-coloured cloth would do – I have even used a duvet cover on one occasion
- Camera. This photograph was taken in daylight, but the light is limited and coming from one side only

> **"I like the flowers to sigh and relax into place**

I create these sorts of arrangements and photographs for my own pleasure, which means I'm not thinking of what my customer wants or working to a time constraint – it's an opportunity to practise floristry and design, and to play with light.

Usually the arrangements are front facing (which means the viewer is not invited to look around the back of them!) because I'm concentrating on what I can see through the camera lens. Often, I've found I've placed the flowers, stood back and felt satisfied with an arrangement, only to look through the lens and be disappointed: flowers are somehow mercurial like that, looking good to the naked eye, but not to the camera. One trick to overcome this is to pay extra attention to the light and how it falls on the petals, as seen strictly from the camera's point of view.

The compositions are inspired by the golden age of the Dutch masters, whose still-life masterpieces are particularly beguiling to me precisely because the lighting was so fundamental to their success. Originally these paintings were commissioned by rich patrician Dutch families to catalogue their horticultural stock. Gardening had become fashionable in the seventeenth century and owning plants gave you status. But flowers are fleeting, and painters were employed to capture their ephemeral beauty so their owners could show off long after the last petal had dropped. But if you look closely at an original still life, you'll notice that the flowers in the arrangement could not have been painted on the same day. These images are collaged together, depicting flowers that couldn't be growing at the same time. The flowers would have been painted when they were in season and the whole confection might have taken six months to complete. Like a forerunner to digital Photoshop, these images trick the beholder into believing they are in real time.

Symbolism in imagery had much more power and meaning back then. These paintings would have been telling a coded story about the world. For example, an audience would have known that candles represent the passing of time, insects transformation and decay, and mirrors the soul. I am not slavish to these symbols in my compositions, but I like to play with my collection of ephemera and my scenes are made up of treasures I find in my cupboards. Be playful, take your time and enjoy the practice. I often make an arrangement and let it evolve over several days. I like the flowers to sort of sigh and relax into place, to take on their own life – and I like to document that process. Have a go with your garden flowers and see your arrangement as a record of your horticultural skills. Use your own treasure and make up your own symbols to tell your unique story.

Electric Daisy Flower Farm is a sustainable farm in Somerset and a flower shop in Highgate, London. electricdaisyflowerfarm.co.uk

Flowers of the sea

Following in the footsteps of nineteenth-century seaweed foragers, Melanie Molesworth and Julia Bird create beautiful artworks from their coastal finds. We visited their studio in Cornwall and asked them to share the secrets to a good pressing

Photography *Oliver White-Smith*

The coastlines close to our homes in Dorset and Cornwall provide myriad glorious and vibrant seaweed specimens with which we create our artwork. The amazing range of shapes and colours continually inspire us – from the rich burgundy reds of dulse and beautiful fan weed through to the pale, delicate pinks of sea beech and the deep, earthy greens of the wracks. Our seaweed pressings are lasting celebrations of these flowers of the sea.

Melanie and I were not the first to discover the joy of collecting and pressing seaweeds. We follow in the footsteps of many women throughout history who have done the same – the Victorians were particularly passionate about seaweed and many of their collections survive today in private collections and museums. Queen Victoria was a seaweed hunter, known to forage and press seaweeds from around her holiday home Osborne House on the Isle of Wight. Anna Atkins (1799–1871) was another exceptional woman who created the first cyanotypes with seaweeds – her vivid blue images remain as beautifully haunting today as when she created them.

This traditional art of seaweed foraging and pressing is something we enjoyed together as a creative pastime, but it soon blossomed into our business, Molesworth & Bird, and now we spend our days on the beach and back in our studio creating unique artworks. ➔

Source the seaweed

The first step to creating your own pressings is of course an expedition to your favourite coastal haunts to search for some seaweed. For a successful hunt – one that yields a wide range of species worth pressing – there are a few things you need to think about.

First, rocky coastlines with small coves are generally more fruitful than long stretches of sandy or shingle beaches. Most days there will be something to find, but the best foraging is usually done after a spell of onshore wind. It is the wave action that tears the seaweed from the seabed, allowing it to drift in with the tide.

Aim to time your forage a couple of hours before low water. Keep an eye out for the turning tide so you don't risk getting stranded! It's easily done when you are totally absorbed in the search.

There are no hard and fast rules as to where to find good specimens, but try looking for beauties floating in the shallows, drifting in rock pools or caught up among clumps of the larger seaweeds (kelps and wracks) washed up on the beach.

We make a point of never harvesting growing seaweed – always leave nature intact. There is generally plenty floating free or washed up on the shore to choose from. Edit your collection before taking it home, aiming for a good selection of colours and varieties.

Always check there are no living creatures clinging on. The bushier seaweeds might need a good shake in a rock pool or the shallows to encourage any marine life to swim away. Rinse the seaweeds in seawater at the beach and transport them in a waterproof container with a little seawater to keep them fresh.

Many seaweeds are quite tricky to identify – there are more than 650 specimens around the UK – so try to do this before pressing as it is much easier to observe their form, texture and colour. It's also nice to note the date and location of the find along with its common and botanical name. We recommend the second edition of *Seaweeds of Britain and Ireland* by Francis Bunker and Juliet A Brodie as an aid to identification.

Gather the pressing paraphernalia

- A white bowl or tray filled with clean water to hold your specimens (white so you can see the form of the seaweed clearly)
- A shallow, white-bottomed tray filled with approx 4–5cm of water (large enough to easily accommodate your pressing paper)
- Kitchen paper or tea towels
- Watercolour paper for pressing
- Non-stick baking paper
- Newspaper
- Cardboard (smooth, not corrugated)
- Small pair of sharp-pointed scissors for trimming seaweed
- Pair of scissors for cutting paper
- Small, fine-tipped paint brush for positioning seaweed
- Press or equivalent pile of heavy books, magazines or even bricks

Look for beauties floating in the shallows, drifting in rock pools or caught up in clumps of kelp

Press the seaweed

Once home, it is best to begin the seaweed-pressing process as soon as you can. If you need to leave it until the next day, store your finds in some seawater in a waterproof container left open and in a cool place to prevent the seaweed from deteriorating.

Once you are ready to press, rinse each seaweed in fresh water then place into a white bowl or tray filled with water. Any seaweeds you don't want to press can be returned to the beach or added to your garden compost.

Choose a single or group of specimens you want to press and place in a clean, shallow tray filled with about 5cm of fresh water. In the tray, position the floating seaweed using a paint brush, teasing it and adjusting it until you find a natural arrangement that you like. You may find you have to snip off a few branches with scissors to achieve the best form.

Gently slide a sheet of watercolour paper under the specimen, continuing to adjust and position the seaweed with the paintbrush. You need to work fast at this stage to avoid the paper becoming too saturated.

Very gently lift the paper from the tray with your seaweed on the paper, allowing the water to drain away. Place the seaweed pressing-paper onto an absorbent surface (tea towel or kitchen paper). Any fronds that have moved in the process can be carefully adjusted with a paintbrush. Then gently dab the paper to remove any excess water taking care not to dislodge the seaweed.

Take your sheet of cardboard (this is your rigid base layer) and add 3–4 folded layers of newspaper (more if the seaweed you are pressing is a ➔

heavy, bulky specimen), then lay your paper with the pressing directly on to it. Cut a sheet of baking paper to size and place it over the specimen. This prevents the seaweed from sticking to the paper layers above. Then layer with 3–4 more layers of folded newspaper before covering with a final cardboard sheet.

Further pressings can be added to this in the same sequence of layers, creating a lasagne of pressings. The cardboard is there to separate each pressing from the next, preventing the form of one seaweed affecting another once it is in the press.

Place your seaweed pile in a press or under an even and heavy weight, such as a pile of magazines, books or even bricks.

Allow 24 hours before the exciting moment when you open your press to reveal the previous day's work. This is just the beginning of the process. You will need to replace all the damp newspaper and baking paper with fresh, dry layers. Usually the cardboard sheets are dry enough to continue using, but replace them if they have become damp, as dampness encourages mould to grow.

With this in mind, it is important to continue checking your seaweeds every 4–5 days (more often if you are pressing thicker seaweeds that hold more moisture) and replace any damp layers with fresh card/paper. This is also an opportunity to discard any pressings that haven't worked well – these are not going to improve with time! It's all about experimenting and discovering which species work for you.

Keep your chosen pieces in the press for 2–3 weeks or until they are completely dry. Once dry you can

> We follow in the footsteps of many women throughout history who were passionate about seaweed

consider framing. We recommend displaying your pressings away from direct sunlight to avoid fading. It's worth noting that green seaweeds in particular will fade in colour quite rapidly to a soft, light brown. They are still beautiful but possibly disappointing if you are expecting them to remain a vibrant green!

Melanie and Julia are the founders of Molesworth & Bird, a studio creating art prints, cards, tea towels and other homeware. They are the authors of *Seaweed: Foraging, Collecting, Pressing* (Pavilion), out in July. moleswortandbird.com

TWO WAYS WITH...

Harriet Mansell, head chef and owner of seasonal restaurants Robin Wylde and Lilac in Lyme Regis, makes use of this herbal wildflower

Cucumber and herb robert soup

SERVES 5

This is a chilled soup topped with a beautiful apple and pear granita.

THE SOUP

- 1½ cucumbers
- 1 handful (roughly 40g) herb robert leaves
- 2 sprigs tarragon
- 2 sprigs dill
- 7 mint leaves
- ½ tablespoon sea salt
- ½ teaspoon sugar
- 1 tablespoon Greek-style yogurt (more if you like it creamy)
- 1½ tablespoons cold-pressed rapeseed oil (extra to drizzle)
- 1 tablespoon white wine vinegar
- 1½ lemons, juiced

THE GRANITA

- 3 apples
- 3 pears
- Lemon juice to taste
- Small pinch salt
- Small pinch sugar (optional)

To make the soup, peel the cucumbers, then chop into blendable-sized chunks. Pick the herb robert and herbs and discard any tough stems. Add the cucumber, herbs and all other ingredients to a blender and blitz until smooth – you can strain through a fine sieve if you like it really silky. Give it a taste and add further seasoning of lemon, salt or sugar if you like.

To make the granita, peel and decore the apples and pears and juice them. Season with lemon juice and salt, and add sugar if needed. Put the juice in a box and into the freezer. After a few hours (once the juice is frozen) break up the ice crystals with a fork. Do this periodically until you serve to avoid it turning into a frozen block. Ultimately, you will have a slushy ice crystal mix – the granita.

Serve the soup with a spoonful of granita on top, drizzled with rapeseed oil and garnished with herb robert leaves, hyssop flowers or other pretty edibles.

HERB ROBERT

BASE INGREDIENTS

- 2 cucumbers (unpeeled)
- Salt
- 1 handful (roughly 40g) herb robert leaves and stems
- 30g lemon juice (roughly 1 lemon)
- 30g caster sugar
- 1 bottle neutral gin

FOR 1 COCKTAIL

- 50ml cucumber-infused gin
- 20ml herb robert and cucumber juice (adjust depending on how salty it is)
- 30ml lemon syrup
- 50ml dry white wine

Herb robert 'tzatzini'

The herb robert in this cocktail delivers a real savoury punch! It was created by Lilac restaurant manager Harriet Hallett, who wanted to use up a waste product of the kitchen: the juice from the salted cucumbers that go into our tzatziki. It's now my favourite summer cocktail.

To make the cucumber-infused gin, chop the other cucumber into chunks small enough to fit inside the mouth of a bottle and add to the gin. Allow it to steep for 24 hours, then strain the gin through a sieve.

To make the herb robert and cucumber juice, chop one of the cucumbers and add it to the blender with the salt (to taste) and the herb robert. Blitz until smooth. Strain through a muslin or fine sieve.

To make the lemon syrup combine the lemon juice with the sugar in a pan over a medium heat until it becomes a syrup. You can increase the quantities to make more – use 50:50 lemon juice to sugar.

To make the cocktail, add the measured ingredients to a Boston shaker and shake hard over ice. Double strain into a chilled martini coupe. Garnish with a herb robert leaf.

Photography *Aloha Bonser-Shaw*

robinwylde.com | lilacwine.co.uk

A modern pioneer of biodynamic growing, **Jane Scotter** has been farming in tune with the planet's rhythms for 30 years at her Herefordshire farm Fern Verrow. She tells us about thieving rabbits and why she appreciates King Charles

Describe your relationship with nature.
Close. And volatile. Mainly because I have to earn my living from the great outdoors. But working with plants is a rewarding business. If I had to, I would do the same all over again.

In biodynamic growing, you draw on the energies of the sun, moon, stars and planets, as well as the four elements – do they have an impact on you personally?
Absolutely, they have an impact on everything. We can't see these forces and we can't quantify them, but they are so powerful – that's evident from the impact of the moon on the tides. The 'unfavourable' days on the biodynamic calendar can sometimes be chaotic days for me too. I am tuned in to that to a certain point, but what I'm focused on is gorgeous vegetables and flowers.

Is that what drew you to this growing method?
Yes, and the spiritual involvement that people don't necessarily name but often feel. For example, when you grow your first ever lettuce, it will be the best lettuce you've ever eaten in your life – not just because it's delicious, but because you gave it your love. You've got to give something of yourself and put the effort in, but it does work.

Farming is by its nature an intervention in the landscape. How does it feel to make that intervention?
Really good. It's very nice to transform a less favourable area for growing into somewhere lush and fairy tale-like. Fern Verrow is up high and there's a huge amount of rainfall. But I have worked to nurture the soil and I've had 28 years of fertility on this land. It's a hugely creative and artistic endeavour.

Do you have a favourite biodynamic preparation?
I like the compost preparations using nettle, dandelion, chamomile, valerian and oak bark – they're very effective. I also love using the 500 [a cow manure preparation] on dull, damp days, applying it to the soil like a tonic. And I think of the 501 [horn silica] as a ripener: it enhances the light and brings me beautiful blooms and good-tasting fruit.

What's the biggest lesson you've learned?
That patience is super important. I'm not a naturally patient person, but it's nice when I can step back and think, Don't worry, everything will be okay. I've been a happier grower since adopting that attitude. Sometimes I just can't – I worry when the wind is blowing hard because my greenhouse is delicate, and I worry about the rabbits stealing my tulips.

You share your biodynamic growing wisdom through a new online course. What would you say to someone starting out?
If you want the best results, give it a shot – it's the ultimate form of organic growing. And use the biodynamic calendar. I always do my sowing on the right day; that's the really important date. It's practical, too. Come spring, there's so much to do; when I first started farming, I didn't know which way out of the door to turn, but the calendar takes that stress away.

Do you have a nature hero?
In terms of gardens, I love Sissinghurst. Among the landscape designers, I love what Julian and Isabel Bannerman do. And among the growers, the approach of Bob Cannard [of sustainable Green String Farm in California] is instinctive and thoughtful. I also appreciate what King Charles stands for and his support for organic farmers like me.

What plant or animal would you like to be reborn as?
I think I would like to be a really beautiful rose bush or lilac tree or a rambling clematis. Or a really cute little dog. b

Jane Scotter's new course, How to Grow Exceptional Produce, is available at createacademy.com. fernverrow.com

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